Ryan Marah Ellis

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Содержание

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PART FIRST
THE PLEDGE

"The only one of the name who is not a gentleman"; those words were repeated over and over by a young fellow who walked, one autumn morning, under the shade of old trees and along a street of aristocratic houses in old New Orleans.

He would have been handsome had it not been for the absolutely wicked expression of his face as he muttered to himself while he walked. He looked about twenty-five – dark and tall – so tall as to be a noticeable man among many men, and so well proportioned, and so confidently careless in movement as not to be ungainly – the confidence of strength.

Some negroes whom he passed turned to look after him, even the whites he met eyed him seriously. He looked like a man off a sleepless journey, his eyes were bloodshot, his face haggard, and over all was a malignant expression as of lurking devilishness.

He stopped at a house set back from the street, and half-smothered in the shade of the trees and great creeping vines that flung out long arms from the stone walls. There was a

stately magnificence about its grand entrance, and its massive proportions – it showed so plainly the habitation of wealth. Evidently the ill-natured looking individual was not a frequent visitor there, for he examined the house, and the numbers about, with some indecision; then his eyes fell on the horse-block, in the stone of which a name was carved. A muttered something, which was not a blessing, issued from his lips as he read it, but with indecision at an end he strode up the walk to the house. A question was answered by the dubious-looking darky at the door, and a message was sent somewhere to the upper regions; then the darky, looking no less puzzled, requested the gentleman to follow him to the "Young Massa's" study. The gentleman did so, noting with those wicked side glances of his the magnificence of the surroundings, and stopping short before a picture of a brunette, willowy girl that rested on an easel. The face was lovely enough to win praise from any man, but an expression, strangely akin to that bestowed on the carven name outside, escaped him. Through the lattice of the window the laughter of woman came to him – as fresh and cheery as the light of the young sun, and bits of broken sentences also – words of banter and retort.

"Ah, but he is beautiful – your husband!" sighed a girlish voice with the accent of France; "so impressibly charming! And so young. You two children!"

Some gay remonstrance against childishness was returned, and then the first voice went on:

"And the love all of one quick meeting, and one quick, grand

passion that only the priest could bring cure for? And how shy you were, and how secret – was it not delightful? Another Juliet and her Romeo. Only it is well your papa is not so ill-pleased."

"Why should he be? My family is no better than my husband's – only some richer; but we never thought of that – we two. I thought of his beautiful changeable eyes, and he thought of my black ones, and – well, I came home to papa a wife, and my husband said only, 'I love her,' when we were blamed for the haste and the secrecy, and papa was won – as I think every one is, by his charming boyishness; but," with a little laugh, "he is not a boy."

"Though he is younger than yourself?"

"Well, what then? I am twenty-three. You see we are quite an old couple, for he is almost within a year of being as old. Come; my lord has not yet come down. I have time to show you the roses. I am sure they are the kind you want."

Their chatter and gaiety grew fainter as they walked away from the window, and their playful chat added no light to the visitor's face. He paced up and down the room with the eager restlessness of some caged thing. A step sounded outside that brought him to a halt – a step and a mellow voice with the sweetness of youth in it. Then the door opened and a tall form entered swiftly, and quick words of welcome and of surprise came from him as he held out his hand heartily.

But it was not taken. The visitor stuck his hands in the pockets of his coat, and surveyed his host with a good deal of contempt.

Yet he was a fine, manly-looking fellow, almost as tall as his visitor, and fairer in coloring. His hair was a warmer brown, while the other man's was black. His eyes were frank and open, while the other's were scowling and contracted. They looked like allegorical types of light and darkness as they stood there, yet something in the breadth of forehead and form of the nose gave a suggestion of likeness to their faces.

The younger one clouded indignantly as he drew back his offered hand.

"Why, look here, old fellow, what's up?" he asked hastily, and then the indignation fled before some warmer feeling, and he went forward impulsively, laying his hand on the other's arm.

"Just drop that," growled his visitor, "I didn't come here for that sort of thing, but for business – yes – you can bet your money on that!"

His host laughed and dropped into a chair.

"Well, you don't look as if you come on a pleasure trip," he agreed, "and I think you might look a little more pleasant, considering the occasion and – and – everything. I thought father would come down sure, when I wrote I was married, but I didn't expect to see anyone come in this sort of a temper. What is it? Has your three-year-old come in last in the fall race, or have you lost money on some other fellow's stock, and what the mischief do you mean by sulking at me?"

"It isn't the three-year-old, and it isn't money lost," and the dark eyes were watching every feature of the frank young face;

"the business I've come on is – you."

"Look here," and the young fellow straightened up with the conviction that he had struck the question, "is it because of my – marriage?"

"Rather." Still those watchful eyes never changed.

"Well," and the fair face flushed a little, "I suppose it wasn't just the correct thing; but you're not exactly the preacher for correct deportment, are you?" and the words, though ironical, were accompanied by such a bright smile that no offense could be taken from them. "But I'll tell you how it happened. Sit down. I would have sent word before, if I'd suspected it myself, but I didn't. Now don't look so glum, old fellow. I never imagined you would care. You see we were invited to make up a yachting party and go to Key West. We never had seen each other until the trip, and – well, we made up for the time we had lost in the rest of our lives; though I honestly did not think of getting married – any more than you would. And then, all at once, what little brains I had were upset. It began in jest, one evening in Key West, and the finale of it was that before we went to sleep that night we were married. No one knew it until we got back to New Orleans, and then I wrote home at once. Now, I'm ready for objections."

"When you left home you were to be back in two months – it is four now. Why didn't you come?"

"Well, you know I was offered the position of assistant here to Doctor Grenier; that was too good to let go."

"Exactly; but you could have got off, I reckon, to have spent

your devoted father's birthday at home – if you had wanted to."

"He was your father first," was the good-humored retort.

"Why didn't you come home?"

There was a hesitation in the younger face. For the first time he looked ill at ease.

"I don't know why I should give you any reason except that I did not want to," he returned, and then he arose, walking back and forth a couple of times across the room and stopping at a window, with his back to his visitor. "But I will," he added, impulsively. "I stayed away on account of – Annie."

The dark eyes fairly blazed at the name.

"Yes?"

"I – I was a fool when I was home last spring," continued the young fellow, still with his face to the window. "I had never realized before that she had grown up or that she was prettier than anyone I knew, until you warned me about it – you remember?"

"I reckon I do," was the grim reply.

"Well, I tried to be sensible. I did try," he protested, though no contradiction was made. "And after I left I concluded I had better stay away until – well, until we were both a little older and more level-headed."

"It's a pity you didn't reach that idea before you left," said the other significantly.

"What!"

"And before you turned back for that picture you had forgotten."

"What do you mean" and for the first time a sort of terror shone in his face – a dread of the dark eyes that were watching him so cruelly. "Tell me what it is you mean, brother."

"You can just drop that word," was the cold remark. "I haven't any relatives to my knowledge. Your father told me this morning I was the only one of the name who was not a gentleman. I reckon I'll get along without either father or brother for the rest of my life. The thing I came here to see about is the homestead. It is yours and mine – or will be some day. What do you intend doing with your share?"

"Well, I'm not ready to make my will yet," said the other, still looking uneasy as he waited further explanations.

"I rather think you'll change your mind about that, and fix it right here, and now. To-day I want you to transfer every acre of your share to Annie."

"What?"

"To insure her the home you promised your mother she should always have."

"But look here – "

"To insure it for her and – her child."

The face at the window was no longer merely startled, it was white as death.

"Good God! You don't mean that!" he gasped. "It is not true. It can't be true!"

"You contemptible cur! You damnable liar!" muttered the other through his teeth. "You sit there like the whelp that you are,

telling me of this woman you have married, with not a thought of that girl up in Kentucky that you had a right to marry. Shooting you wouldn't do her any good, or I wouldn't leave the work undone. Now I reckon you'll make the transfer."

The other had sat down helplessly, with his head in his hands.

"I can't believe it – I can't believe it," he repeated heavily. "Why – why did she not write to me?"

"It wasn't an easy thing to write, I reckon," said the other bitterly, "and she waited for you to come back. She did send one letter, but you were out on the water with your fine friends, and it was returned. The next we heard was the marriage. Word got there two days ago, and then – she told me."

"You!" and he really looked unsympathetic enough to exempt him from being chosen as confidant of heart secrets.

"Yes; and she shan't be sorry for it if I can help it. What about that transfer?"

"I'll make it;" and the younger man rose to his feet again with eyes in which tears shone. "I'll do anything under God's heaven for her! I've never got rid of the sight of her face. It – it hoodooed me. I couldn't get rid of it! – or of remorse. I thought it best to stay away, we were so young to marry, and there was my profession to work for yet; and then on top of all my sensible plans there came that invitation on the yacht – and so you know the whole story; and now – what will become of her?"

"You fix that transfer, and I'll look after her."

"You! I don't deserve this of you, and – "

"No; I don't reckon you do," returned the other, tersely; "and when you – damn your conceit! – catch me doing that or anything else on your account, just let me know. It isn't for either one of you, for that matter. It's because I promised."

The younger dropped his arms and head on the table.

"You promised!" he groaned. "I – I promised as well as you, and mother believed me – trusted me, and, now – oh, mother! mother!"

His remorseful emotion did not stir the least sympathy in his listener, only a chilly unconcern as to his feelings in the matter.

"You, you cried just about that way when you made the promise," he remarked indifferently. "It was wasted time and breath then, and I reckon it's the same thing now. You can put in the rest of your life in the wailing and gnashing of teeth business if you want to – you might get the woman you married to help you, if you tell her what she has for a husband. But just now there are other things to attend to. I am leaving this part of the country in less than six hours, and this thing must be settled first. I want your promise to transfer to Annie all interest you have in the homestead during your life-time, and leave it to her by will in case the world is lucky enough to get rid of you."

"I promise."

His head was still on the table; he did not look up or resent in any way the taunts thrown at him. He seemed utterly crushed by the revelations he had listened to.

"And another thing I want settled is, that you are never again

to put foot on that place or in that house, or allow the woman you married to go there, that you will neither write to Annie nor try to see her."

"But there might be circumstances – "

"There are no circumstances that will keep me from shooting you like the dog you are, if you don't make that promise, and keep it," said the other deliberately. "I don't intend to trust to your word. But you'll never find me too far out of the world to get back here if you make it necessary for me to come. And the promise I expect is that you'll never set foot on the old place again without my consent – " and the phrase was too ironical to leave much room for hope.

"I promise. I tell you I'll do anything to make amends," he moaned miserably.

"Your whole worthless life wouldn't do that!" was the bitter retort. "Now, there is one thing more I want understood," and his face became more set and hardened; "Annie and her child are to live in the house that should be theirs by right, and they are to live there respected – do you hear? That man you call father has about as much heart in him as a sponge. He would turn her out of the house if he knew the truth, and in this transfer of yours he is to know nothing of the reason – understand that. He is quite ready to think it prompted by your generous, affectionate heart, and the more he thinks that, the better it will be for Annie. You will have a chance to pose for the rest of your life as one of the most honorable of men, and the most loyal to a dead mother's trust,"

and a sound that would have been a laugh but for its bitterness broke from him as he walked to the door; "that will suit you, I reckon. One more lie doesn't matter, and the thing I expect you to do is to make that transfer to-day and send it to Annie with a letter that anyone could read, and be none the wiser – the only letter you're ever to write her. You have betrayed that trust; it's mine now."

"And you'll be worth it," burst out the other heart-brokenly; "worth a dozen times over more than I ever could be if I tried my best. You'll take good care of her, and – and – good God! If I could only speak to her once!"

"If you do, I'll know it, and I'll kill you!" said the man at the door.

He was about to walk out when the other arose bewilderedly.

"Wait," he said, and his livid face was convulsed pitifully. He was so little more than a boy. "This that you have told me has muddled my head. I can't think. I know the promises, and I'll keep them. If shooting myself would help her, I'd do that; but you say you are leaving the country, and Annie is to live on at the old place, and – and yet be respected? I can't understand how, with – under the – the circumstances. I – "

"No, I don't reckon you can," scowled the other, altogether unmoved by the despairing eyes and broken, remorseful words. "It isn't natural that you should understand a man, or how a man feels; but Annie's name shall be one you had a right to give her four months ago – "

"What are you saying?" broke in the other with feverish intensity; "tell me! tell me what it is you mean!"

"I mean that she shan't be cheated out of a name for herself and child by your damned rascality! Her name for the rest of her life will be the same as yours – just remember that when you forward that transfer. She is my wife. We were married an hour before I started."

Then the door closed, and the dark, malignant looking fellow stalked out into the morning sunlight, and through the scented walk where late lillies nodded as he passed. He seemed little in keeping with their fragrant whiteness, for he looked not a whit less scowlingly wicked than on his entrance; and of some men working on the lawn, one said to another:

"Looks like he got de berry debbel in dem snappin' eyes – see how dey shine. Mighty rakish young genelman to walk out o' dat doah – look like he been on a big spree."

And when the bride and her friend came chattering in, with their hands full of roses, they found a strange, unheard-of thing had happened. The tall young husband, so strong, so long acclimated, had succumbed to the heat of the morning, or the fragrance of the tuberose beside him, and had fallen in a fainting fit by the door.

PART SECOND
"A CULTUS CORRIE"

CHAPTER I.
ON SCOT'S MOUNTAIN

"The de'il tak' them wi' their weeman folk, whose nerves are too delicate for a squaw man, or an Injun guide. I'd tak' no heed o' them if I was well, an' I'll do less now I'm plagued wi' this reminder o' that grizzly's hug. It gives me many's the twinge whilst out lookin' to the traps."

"Where's your gallantry, MacDougall?" asked a deep, rather musical voice from the cabin door; "and your national love for the 'winsome sex,' as I've heard you call it? If ladies are with them you can't refuse."

"Can I not? Well, I can that same now," said the first speaker, emphasizing his speech by the vim with which he pitched a broken-handled skillet into the cupboard – a cupboard made of a wooden box. "Mayhaps you think I haven't seen a white woman these six months, I'll be a breakin' my neck to get to their camp across there. Well, I will not; they may be all very fine, no doubt – folk from the East; but ye well know a lot o' tenderfeet in the bush are a sight worse to tak' the care of than the wild things they'll

be tryin' to hunt. 'A man's a fool who stumbles over the same stone twice,' is an old, true sayin', an' I know what I'm talkin' of. It's four years this autumn since I was down in the Walla Walla country, an' there was a fine party from the East, just as these are; an' they would go up into the Blue Mountains, an' they would have me for a guide; an' if the Lord'll forgive me for associatin' with sich a pack o' lunatics for that trip, I'll never be caught wi' the same bait again."

"What did they do to you?" asked the voice, with a tinge of amusement in it.

"To me? They did naught to me but pester me wi' questions of insane devisin'. Scarce a man o' them could tether a beast or lasso one that was astray. They had a man servant, a sort o' flunky, to wait on them and he just sat around like a bump on a log, and looked fearsomely for Injuns an' grizzlies. They would palaver until all hours in the night, about the scientific causes of all things we came across. Many a good laugh I might have had, if I had na been disgusted wi' the pretenses o' the poor bodies. Why, they knew not a thing but the learnin' o' books. They were from the East – down East, they said; that is, the Southeast, I suppose they meant to say; and their flunky said they were well-to-do at home, and very learned, the poor fools! Well, I'll weary myself wi' none others o' the same ilk."

"You're getting cranky, Mac, from being too much alone;" and the owner of the voice lounged lazily up from the seat of the cabin door, and stood looking in at the disgusted Scotchman,

bending ever so slightly a dark, well-shaped head that was taller than the cross-piece above the door.

"Am I, now?" asked the old man, getting up stiffly from filling a pan of milk for the cat. "Well, then, I have a neighbor across on the Maple range that is subject o' late to the same complaint, but from a wide difference o' reason;" and he nodded his head significantly at the man in the door, adding: "An' there's a subject for a debate, Jack Genesee, whether loneliness is worse on the disposition than the influence o' wrong company."

Jack Genesee straightened out of his lounging attitude, and stepped back from the door-way with a decision that would impress a man as meaning business.

"None o' that, MacDougall," he said curtly, dropping his hand with a hillman's instinct to the belt where his revolvers rested. "I reckon you and I will be better friends through minding our own business and keeping to our own territory in future;" and whistling to a beautiful brown mare that was browsing close to the cabin, he turned to mount her, when the old man crossed the floor quickly and laid a sinewy, brown hand on his arm.

"Bide a bit, Genesee," he said, his native accent always creeping upward in any emotion. "Friends are rare and scarce in this Chinook land. You're a bit hasty in your way, and mayhaps I'm a bit curious in mine; but I'll no let ye leave Davy MacDougall's like that just for the want o' sayin' I'm regretful at havin' said more than I should o' you and yours. I canna lose a friend o' four years for a trifle like that."

The frankness of the old man's words made the other man drop the bridle and turn back with outstretched hand.

"That's all right, Mac," he said, heartily; "say no more about it. I am uglier than the devil to get along with sometimes, and you're about straight when you say I'm a crank; only – well, it's nobody's fault but my own."

"No, o' course not," said MacDougall in a conciliatory tone as he went back to his dish-washing at the table – the dishes were tin pans and cups, and the dish-pan was an iron pot – "to be sure not; but the half-breeds are pizen in a man's cabin, an' that Talapa, wi' the name that's got from a prairie wolf an' the Injun de'il, is well called – a full-blood Injun is easier to manage, my lad; an' then," he added, quizzically, "I'm but givin' ye the lay o' the land where I've fought myself, an' mayhaps got wounded."

The "lad," who was about thirty-five, laughed heartily at this characteristic confession. There was evidently some decided incongruity between the old Scotchman's statement and his quaint housewifery, as he wrapped a cloth reduced to strings around a fork and washed out a coffee-pot with the improvised mop. Something there was in it that this man Genesee appreciated, and his continued laughter drew the beautiful mare again to his side, slipping her velvety nose close to his ear, and muzzling there like a familiar spirit that had a right to share her master's emotions.

"All right, Mowitza," he said in a promising tone; "we'll hit the bush by and by. But old sulky here is slinging poisoned arrows at

our Kloocheman. We can't stand that, you know. We don't like cooking our own grub, do we, Mowitza? Shake your head and tell him '*halo*' – that's right. *Skookum Kiutan! Skookum*, Mowitza!"

And the man caressed the silky brown head, and murmured to her the Indian jargon of endearment and praise, and the mare muzzled closer and whinnied an understanding of her master. MacDougall put away the last pan, threw a few knots of cedar on the bit of fire in the stone fire-place, and came to the door just as the sun, falling back of the western mountains, threw a flood of glory about the old cabin of the mountaineer. The hill-grass back of it changed from uncertain green to spears of amber as the soft September winds stole through it. Away below in the valley, the purple gloom of dark spruces was burying itself in night's shadows. Here and there a poison-vine flashed back defiance under its crimson banners, and again a white-limbed aspen shone like a shapely ghost from between lichen-covered bowlders. But slowly the gloaming crept upward until the shadow-line fell at the cabin door, and then up, up, past spruce and cedar, past the scrub of the dwarf growths, past the invisible line that the snakes will not cross, on up to the splintered crest, where the snows glimmer in the sunshine, and about which the last rays of the sun linger and kiss and fondle, long after a good-bye has been given to the world beneath.

Such was but one of the many recurring vistas of beauty which the dwellers of the northern hills are given to delight in – if they care to open their eyes and see the glorious smile with which the

earth ever responds to the kiss of God.

MacDougall had seen many of the grand panoramas which day and night on Scot's mountain give one, and he stood in the door unheeding this one. His keen eyes, under their shaggy brows, were directed to the younger man's bronzed face.

"There ye go!" he said, half peevishly; "ye jabber Chinook to that Talapa and to the mare until it's a wonder ye know any English at all; an' when ye be goin' back where ye belong, it'll be fine, queer times ye'll have with your ways of speech."

Genesee only laughed shortly – an Indian laugh, in which there is no melody.

"I don't reckon I belong anywhere, by this time, except in this Chinook region; consequently," he added, looking up in the old man's interested face, "I'm not likely to be moving anywhere, if that's what you're trying to find out."

MacDougall made a half-dissenting murmur against trying to find out anything, but Genesee cut him short without ceremony.

"The fact is, Mac," he continued; "you are a precious old galoot – a regular nervous old numbskull. You've been as restless as a newly-caught grizzly ever since I went down to Cœur d'Alene, two weeks ago – afraid I was going to cut loose from Tamahnous Peak and pack my traps and go back to the diggin's; is that it? Don't lie about it. The whole trip wasn't worth a good lie, and all it panned out for me was empty pockets."

"Lord! lad, ye canna mean to say ye lost – '

"Every damned red," finished Mr. Genesee complacently.

"An' how – "

"Cards and mixed drinks," he said, laconically. "Angels in the wine-rooms, and a slick individual at the table who had a better poker hand than I had. How's that as a trade for six months' work? How does it pan out in the balance with half-breeds?"

Evidently it staggered MacDougall. "It is no much like ye to dissipate, Genesee," he said, doubtfully. "O' course a man likes to try his chance on the chips once in a way, and to the kelpies o' the drinkin' places one must leave a few dollars, but the mixin' o' drinks or the muddlin' o' the brains is no natural to ye; it may be a divarsion after the hill life, but there's many a kind that's healthier."

"You're a confounded old humbug," said Genesee coolly; "you preach temperance to me, and get drunk as a fiddler all alone here by yourself – not much Scotch in that way of drinking, I can tell you. Hello! who's that?"

MacDougall leaned forward and peered down the path where the sound of a horse's feet were heard coming around the bend.

"It's that man o' Hardy's comin' again about a guide, I have na doubt. I'll send him across Seven-mile Creek to Tyee-Kamooks. They can get a Siwash guide from him, or they can lose themsel's for all me," he said, grumpily, incited thereto, no doubt, by Genesee's criticism of his habits. He often grumbled that his friend from the Maple range was mighty "tetchy" about his own faults, and mighty cool in his opinions of others.

A dark, well-built horse came at an easy, swinging pace out of

the gloom of the spruce boughs and over the green sward toward the cabin; his rider, a fair, fine-looking fellow, in a ranchman's buckskin suit, touched his hat ever so lightly in salute, a courtesy the others returned, Genesee adding the Chinook word that is either salutation or farewell, "*Klahowya*, stranger," and the old man giving the more English speech of "Good evening; won't ye light, stranger?"

"No; obliged to you, but haven't time. I suppose I'm speaking to Mr. MacDougall," and he took his eyes from the tall, dark form of Genesee to address his speech to the old trapper.

"Yes, I'm Davy MacDougall, an' I give a guess you're from the new sheep ranch that's located down Kootenai Park; you're one of Hardy's men."

"No; I'm Hardy."

"Are ye, now?" queried the old fellow in surprise. "I expected to see an older man – only by the cause of hearin' you were married, I suppose. Well, now, I'm right glad to meet wi' a new neighbor – to think of a ranch but a bit of ten miles from Scot's Mountain, an' a white family on it, too! Will ye no' light an' have a crack at a pipe an' a glass?"

Hardy himself was evidently making a much better impression on MacDougall than the messenger who had come to the cabin in the morning.

"No, partner, not any for me," answered the young ranchman, but with so pleasant a negative that even a Westerner could not but accept graciously such a refusal. "I just rode up from camp

myself to see you about a guide for a small party over into the west branch of the Rockies. Ivans, who came to see you this morning, tells me that you are disabled yourself – "

"Yes; that is, I had a hug of a grizzly two weeks back that left the ribs o' my right side a bit sore; but – "

The old man hesitated; evidently his reluctance to act as guide to the poor fools was weakening. This specimen of an Eastern man was not at all the style of the tourists who had disgusted him so.

"An' so I told your man I *thought* I could na guide you," he continued in a debatable way, at which Hardy's blonde mustache twitched suspiciously, and Genesee stooped to fasten a spur that had not needed attention before; for the fact was Mac had felt "ower cranky" that morning, and the messenger had been a stupid fellow who irritated him until he swore by all the carpenter's outfit of a certain workman in Nazareth that he would be no guide for "weemen folk and tenderfeet" in the hills. His vehemence had caused the refusal of Ivans to make a return trip, and Hardy, remembering Ivans' account, was amused, and had an idea that the dark, quiet fellow with the musical voice was amused as well.

"Yes," agreed the stranger; "I understood you could not come, but I wanted to ask if you could recommend an Indian guide. I had Jim Kale engaged – he's the only white man I know in this region; the men on my place are all from south of the Flathead country. He sent me word yesterday he couldn't come for a week

– confound these squaw men! He's gone to hunt caribou with his squaw's people, so I brought my party so far myself, but am doubtful of the trail ahead. One of the ladies is rather nervous about Indians, and that prevented me from getting a guide from them at first; but if we continue, she must accustom herself to Montana surroundings."

"That's the worst o' the weemen folk when it comes to the hills," broke in MacDougall, "they've over easy to be frightened at shadows; a roof an' four walls is the best stoppin' place for a' o' them."

The young ranchman laughed easily.

"I don't believe you have known many of our Kentucky women, Mr. MacDougall; they are not hot-house plants, by any means."

Genesee pushed a wide-brimmed light hat back from his face a little, and for the first time joined the conversation.

"A Kentucky party, did you say, sir?" he queried, with half-careless interest.

"Yes," said Hardy, turning toward him; "relatives of mine from back East, and I wanted to give them a taste of Montana hill life, and a little hunting. But I can't go any farther into the hills alone, especially as there are three ladies in the party; and a man can't take many risks when he has them to consider."

"That's so," said Genesee, with brief sympathy; "big gang?"

"No – only six of us. My sister and her husband, and a cousin, a young lady, are the strangers. Then one of the men off my ranch

who came to look after the pack-mules, and my wife and self. I have an extra horse for a guide if I can pick one up."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you could," said Genesee reflectively; "the woods are full of them, if you want Indian guides, and if you don't – well, it doesn't seem the right thing to let visitors leave the country disappointed, especially ladies, and I reckon I might take charge of your outfit for a week or so."

MacDougall nearly dropped his pipe in his surprise at the offer.

"Well, I'll be – " he began; but Genesee turned on him.

"What's the matter with that?" he asked, looking at Mac levelly, with a glance that said: "Keep your mouth shut." "If I want to turn guide and drop digging in that hill back there, why shouldn't I? It'll be the 'divarsion' you were suggesting a little while back; and if Mr. Hardy wants a guide, give me a recommend, can't you?"

"Do you know the country northwest of here?" asked Hardy eagerly. It was plain to be seen he was pleased at his "find." "Do you live here in the Chinook country? You may be a neighbor of mine, but I haven't the pleasure of knowing your name."

"That's Mac's fault," said the other fellow coolly; "he's master of ceremonies in these diggin's, and has forgotten his business. They call me Genesee Jack mostly, and I know the Kootenai hills a little."

"Indeed, then, he does Mr. Hardy," said MacDougall, finding his voice. "Ye'll find no Siwash born on the hills who knows them

better than does Genesee, only he's been bewitched like, by picks and shovels an' a gulch in the Maple range, for so long it's a bit strange to see him actin' as guide; but you're a lucky man to be gettin' him, Mr. Hardy, I'll tell ye that much."

"I am willing to believe it," said Hardy frankly. "Could you start at once with us, in the morning?"

"I reckon so."

"I will furnish you a good horse," began the ranchman; but Genesee interrupted, shaking his head with a gesture of dissent.

"No, I think not," he said in the careless, musical voice that yet could be so decided in its softness; and he whistled softly, as a cricket chirrups, and the brown mare came to him with long, cat-like movements of the slender limbs, dropping her head to his shoulder.

"This bit of horse-flesh is good enough for me," he said, slipping a long, well-shaped hand over the silky cheek; "an' where I go, Mowitza goes – eh, pet?"

The mare whinnied softly as acknowledgment of the address, and Hardy noticed with admiration the fine points in her sinewy, supple frame.

"Mowitza," he repeated. "That in Chinook means the deer, does it not – or the elk; which is it? I haven't been here long enough to pick up much of the jargon."

"Well, then, ye'll be hearin' enough of it from Genesee," broke in MacDougall. "He'll be forgettin' his native language in it if he lives here five years longer; an' – "

"There, you've said enough," suggested Genesee. "After giving a fellow a recommend for solid work, don't spoil it by an account of his fancy accomplishments. You're likely to overdo it. Yes, Mowitza means a deer, and this one has earned her name. We'll both be down at your camp by sun-up to-morrow; will that do?"

"It certainly will," answered Hardy in a tone of satisfaction. "And the folks below will be mighty glad to know a white man is to go with us. Jim Kale rather made them doubtful of squaw men, and my sister is timid about Indians as steady company through the hills. I must get back and give them the good news. At sun-up to-morrow, Mr. Genesee?"

"At sun-up to-morrow."

CHAPTER II.
AS THE SUN ROSE

Do you know the region of the Kootenai that lies in the northwest corner of a most northwestern state – where the "bunch-grass" of the grazing levels bends even now under a chance wild stallion and his harem of silken-coated mates; where fair upland "parks" spread back from the cool rush of the rivers; where the glittering peaks of the mountains glow at the rise and fall of night like the lances of a guard invincible, that lift their grand silence as a barrier against the puny strife of the outside world?

Do you know what it is to absorb the elastic breath of the mountains at the awakening of day? To stand far above the levels and watch the faint amethystine peaks catch one by one their cap of gold flung to them from an invisible sun? To feel the blood thrill with the fever of an infinite possession as the eyes look out alone over a seemingly creatureless scene of vastness, of indefiniteness of all vague promise, in the growing light of day? To feel the cool crispness of the heights, tempered by the soft "Chinook" winds? To feel the fresh wet dews of the morning on your hands and on your face, and to know them in a dim way odorous – odorous with the virginity of the hills – of the day dawn, with all the sweet things of form or feeling that the new day brings into new life?

A girl on Scot's Mountain seemed to breathe in all that intoxication of the hill country, as she stood on a little level, far above the smoke of the camp-fire, and watched the glowing, growing lights on the far peaks. A long time she had stood there, her riding-dress gathered up above the damp grass, her cap in her hand, and her brown hair tossing in a bath of the winds. Twice a shrill whistle had called her to the camp hidden by the spruce boughs, but she had only glanced down toward the valley, shook her head mutinously, and returned to the study of her panorama; for it seemed so entirely her own – displaying its beauties for her sole surprisal – that it seemed discourteous to ignore it or descend to lower levels during that changing carnival of color. So she just nodded a negative to her unseen whistler below, determined not to leave, even at the risk of getting the leavings of the breakfast – not a small item to a young woman with a healthy, twenty-year-old appetite.

Something at last distracted that wrapt attention. What was it? She heard no sound, had noticed no movement but the stir of the wind in the leaves and the grasses, yet she shrugged her shoulders with a twitchy movement of being disturbed and not knowing by what. Then she gathered her skirts a little closer in her hand and took a step or so backward in an uncertain way, and a moment later clapped the cap on her tumbled hair, and turned around, looking squarely into the face of a stranger not a dozen steps from her, who was watching her with rather sombre, curious eyes. Their steady gaze accounted for the mesmeric disturbance,

but her quick turn gave her revenge, for he flushed to the roots of his dark hair as she caught him watching her like that, and he did not speak just at first. He lifted his wide-brimmed hat, evidently with the intention of greeting her, but his tongue was a little unruly, and he only looked at her, and she at him.

They stood so in reality only a flash of seconds, though it seemed a continuous stare of minutes to both; then the humorous side of the situation appealed to the girl, and her lips twitched ever so slightly as she recovered her speech first and said demurely:

"Good morning, sir."

"How are you?" he returned; and having regained the use of his tongue, he added, in an easier way: "You'll excuse me, lady, if I sort of scared you?"

"Oh, no, I was not at all startled," she answered hastily, "only a little surprised."

"Yes," he agreed, "so was I. That's why I stood there a-staring at you – couldn't just make out if you were real or a ghost, though I never before saw even the ghost of a white woman in this region."

"And you were watching to see if I would vanish into thin air like a Macbeth witch, were you?" she asked quizzically.

He might be on his native heath and she an interloper, but she was much the most at her ease – evidently a young lady of adaptability and considerable self-possession. His eyes had grown wavering and uncertain in their glances, and that flush

made him still look awkward, and she wondered if Macbeth's witches were not unheard-of individuals to him, and she noticed with those direct, comprehensive eyes that a suit of buckskin can be wonderfully becoming to tall, lazy-looking men, and that wide, light sombreros have quite an artistic effect as a frame for dark hair and eyes; and through that decision she heard him say:

"No. I wasn't watching you for anything special, only if you were a real woman, I reckoned you were prospecting around looking for the trail, and – and so I just waited to see, knowing you were a stranger."

"And is that all you know about me?" she asked mischievously. "I know much more than that about you."

"How much?"

"Oh, I know you're just coming from Davy MacDougall's, and you are going to Hardy's camp to act as commander-in-chief of the eastern tramps in it, and your name is Mr. Jack Genesee – and – and – that is all."

"Yes, I reckon it is," he agreed, looking at her in astonishment. "It's a good deal, considering you never saw me before, and I don't know – "

"And you don't know who I am," she rejoined easily. "Well, I can tell you that, too. I'm a wanderer from Kentucky, prospecting, as you would call it, for something new in this Kootenai country of yours, and my name is Rachel Hardy."

"That's a good, square statement," he smiled, put at his ease by the girl's frankness. "So you're one of the party I'm to look

after on this *cultus corrie*?"

"Yes, I'm one of them – Cousin Hardy says the most troublesome of the lot, because I always want to be doing just the things I've no business to"; then she looked at him and laughed a little. "I tell you this at once," she added, "so you will know what a task you have undertaken, and if you're timid, you might back out before it's too late – are you timid?"

"Do I look it?"

"N – no"; but she didn't give him the scrutiny she had at first – only a swift glance and a little hurry to her next question: "What was that queer term you used when speaking of our trip – cul – cultus?"

"Oh, *cultus corrie*! That's Chinook for pleasure ride."

"Is it? What queer words they have. Cousin Harry was telling me it was a mongrel language, made up of Indian, French, English, and any stray words from other tongues that were adjustable to it. Is it hard to learn?"

"I think not – I learned it."

"What becoming modesty in that statement!" she laughed quizzically. "Come, Mr. Jack Genesee, suppose we begin our *cultus corrie* by eating breakfast together; they've been calling me for the past half-hour."

He whistled for Mowitza, and Miss Rachel Hardy recognized at once the excellence of this silken-coated favorite.

"Mowitza; what a musical name!" she remarked as she followed the new guide to the trail leading down the mountain.

"It sounds Russian – is it?"

"No; another Chinook word – look out there; these stones are bad ones to balance on, they're too round, and that gully is too deep below to make it safe."

"I'm all right," she announced in answer to the warning as she amused herself by hopping bird-like from one round, insecure bowlder to another, and sending several bounding and crashing into the gully that cut deep into the heart of the mountain. "I can manage to keep my feet on your hills, even if I can't speak their language. By the way, I suppose you don't care to add Professor of Languages to your other titles, do you, Mr. Jack Genesee?"

"I reckon I'm in the dark now, Miss, sort of blind-fold – can't catch onto what you mean."

"Oh, I was just thinking I might take up the study of Chinook while out here, and go back home overwhelming the natives by my novel accomplishment." And she laughed so merrily at the idea, and looked so quizzically at Genesee Jack's dark, serious face, that he smiled in sympathy.

They had only covered half the trail leading down to the camp, but already, through the slightly strange and altogether unconventional meeting, she found herself making remarks to him with the freedom of a long-known chum, and rather enjoying the curious, puzzled look with which he regarded her when she was quick enough to catch him looking at her at all.

"Stop a moment," she said, just as the trail plunged from the open face of the mountain into the shadow of spruce and cedar.

"You see this every morning, I suppose, but it is a grand treat to me. See how the light has crept clear down to the level land now. I came up here long before there was a sign of the sun, for I knew the picture would be worth it. Isn't it beautiful?"

Her eyes, alight with youth and enthusiasm, were turned for a last look at the sun-kissed country below, to which she directed his attention with one bare, outstretched hand.

"Yes, it is," he agreed; but his eyes were not on the valley of the Kootenai, but on the girl's face.

CHAPTER III.
WHAT IS A SQUAW MAN?

"Rache, I want you to stop it." The voice had an insinuating tone, as if it would express "will you stop it?"

The speaker was a chubby, matronly figure, enthroned on a hassock of spruce boughs, while the girl stretched beside her was drawing the fragrant spikes of green, bit by bit, over closed eyes and smiling; only the mouth and chin could be seen under the green veil, but the corners of the mouth were widening ever so little. Smiles should engender content; they are supposed to be a voucher of sweet thoughts, but at times they have a tendency to bring out all that is irritable in human nature, and the chubby little woman noted that growing smile with rising impatience.

"I am not jesting," she continued, as if there might be a doubt on that question; "and I wish you would stop it."

"You haven't given *it* a name yet. Say, Clara, that sounds like an invitation to drink, doesn't it? – a western invitation."

But her fault-finder was not going to let her escape the subject like that.

"I am not sure it has a name," she said curtly. "No one seems to know whether it is Genesee Jack or Jack Genesee, or whether both are not aliases – in fact, the most equivocal sort of companion for a young girl over these hills."

"What a tempest you raise about nothing, Clara," said the girl

good-humoredly; "one would think that I was in hourly danger of being kidnaped by Mr. Genesee Jack – the name is picturesque in sound, and suits him, don't you think so? But I am sure the poor man is quite harmless, and stands much more in awe of me than I do of him."

"I believe you," assented her cousin tartly. "I never knew you to stand in awe of anything masculine, from your babyhood. You are a born flirt, for all your straightforward, independent ways. Oh, I know you."

"So I hear you say," answered Miss Hardy, peering through the screen of cedar sprays, her eyes shining a little wickedly from their shadows. "You have a hard time of it with me, haven't you, dear? By the way, Clara, who prompted you to this lecture – Hen?"

"No, Hen did not; neither he nor Alec seem to have eyes or ears for anything but deer and caribou; they are constantly airing their new-found knowledge of the country. I had to beg Alec to come to sleep last night, or I believe they would have gossiped until morning. The one redeeming point in your Genesee Jack is that he doesn't talk."

"He isn't my Genesee Jack," returned the girl; "but he does talk, and talk well, I think. You do not know him, that is all, and you never will, with those starchy manners of yours. Not talk! – why, he has taught me a lot of Chinook, and told me all about a miner's life and a hunter's. Not talk! – I've only known him a little over a week, and he has told me his life for ten years back."

"Yes, with no little encouragement from you, I'll wager."

"Well, my bump of curiosity was enlarged somewhat as to his life," acknowledged the girl. "You see he has such an unusual personality, unusually interesting, I mean. I never knew any man like him in the East. Why, he only needs a helmet instead of the sombrero, and armor instead of the hunting suit, and he would make an ideal Launcelot."

"Good gracious, Rache! do stop raving over the man, or I shall certainly have Hen discharge him and take you back to civilization at once."

"But perhaps I won't go back – what then; and perhaps Hen could not be able to see your reason for getting rid of a good guide," said the girl coolly, knowing she had the upper hand of the controversy; "and as to the raving, you know I never said a word about him until you began to find fault with everything, from the cut of his clothes to the name he gives, and then – well, a fellow must stand up for his friends, you know."

"Of course a fellow must," agreed someone back of them, and the young ranchman from the East came down under the branches from the camp-fire just kindled; "that is a manly decision, Rache, and does you credit. But what's the argument?"

"Oh, Clara thinks I am taking root too quickly in the soil of loose customs out here," explained the girl, covering the question, yet telling nothing.

"She doesn't approve of our savage mode of life, does she?" he queried, sympathetically; "and she hasn't seen but a suggestion

of its horrors yet. Too bad Jim Kale did not come; she could have made the acquaintance of a specimen that would no doubt be of interest to her – a squaw man with all his native charms intact."

"Hen," said the girl, rising on her elbow, "I wish you would tell me just what you mean by a 'squaw man'; is it a man who buys squaws, or sells them, or eats them, or – well, what does he do?"

"He marries them – sometimes," was the laconic reply, as if willing to drop the question. But Miss Rache, when interested, was not to be thrust aside until satisfied.

"Is that all?" she persisted; "is he a sort of Mormon, then – an Indian Mormon? And how many do they marry?"

"I never knew them to marry more than one," hazarded Mr. Hardy. "But, to tell the truth, I know very little about their customs; I understand they are generally a worthless class of men, and the term 'squaw man' is a stigma, in a way – the most of them are rather ashamed of it, I believe."

"I don't see why," began Rache.

"No, I don't suppose you do," broke in her cousin Hardy with a relative's freedom, "and it is not necessary that you should; just confine your curiosity to other phases of Missoula County that are open for inspection, and drop the squaw men."

"I haven't picked up any of them yet," returned the girl, rising to her feet, "but I will the first chance I get; and I give you fair warning, you might as well tell me all I want to know, for I will find out."

"I'll wager she will," sighed Clara, as the girl walked away to

where their traps and sachels were stacked under a birch tree, and while she turned things topsy-turvy looking for something, she nodded her head sagaciously over her shoulder at the two left behind; "to be sure she will – she is one of the girls who are always stumbling on just the sort of knowledge that should be kept from them; and this question of your horrid social system out here – well, she will know all about it if she has to interview Ivans or your guide to find out; and I suppose it is an altogether objectionable topic?"

The intonation of the last words showed quite as much curiosity as the girl had declared, only it was more carefully veiled.

"Oh, I don't know as it is," returned her brother; "except under – well – circumstances. But, some way, a white man is mightily ashamed to have it known that he has a squaw wife. Ivans told me that many of them would as soon be shot as to have it known back East where they came from."

"Yes," remarked a gentleman who joined them during this speech, and whose brand-new hunting suit bespoke the "got-up-regardless" tourist; "it is strange, don't you think so? Why, back East we would hear of such a marriage and think it most romantic; but out here – well, it seems hard to convince a Westerner that there is any romance about an Indian."

"And I don't wonder, Alec, do you?" asked Mrs. Houghton, turning to her husband as if sure of sympathy from him; "all the squaws we have seen are horribly slouchy, dirty creatures. I have

yet to see the Indian maiden of romance."

"In their original state they may have possessed all the picturesque dignities and chivalrous character ascribed to them," answered Mr. Houghton, doubtfully; "but if so, their contact with the white race has caused a vast degeneration."

"Which it undoubtedly has," returned Hardy, decidedly. "Mixing of races always has that effect, and in the Indian country it takes a most decided turn. The Siwash or Indian men of this territory may be a thieving, whisky-drinking lot, but the chances are that nine-tenths of the white men who marry among them become more worthless and degraded than the Indian."

"There are, I suppose, exceptions," remarked Houghton.

"Well, there may be," answered Hardy, "but they are not taken into consideration, and that is why a man dislikes to be classed among them. There is something of the same feeling about it that there is back home about a white man marrying a negro."

"Then why do they do it, if they are ashamed of it?" queried Mrs. Houghton with logical directness.

"Well, I suppose because there are no white women here for them to marry," answered her brother, "and Indians or half-breeds are always to be found."

"If ministers are not," added Houghton.

"Exactly!"

"Oh, good gracious!" ejaculated the little matron in a tone of disgust; "no wonder they are ashamed – even the would-be honest ones are likely to incur suspicion, because, as you say, the

exceptions are too few for consideration. A truly delightful spot you have chosen; the moral atmosphere would be a good field for a missionary, I should say – yet you would come here."

"Yes, and I am going to stay, too," said Hardy, in answer to this sisterly tirade. "We see or know but little of those poor devils or their useless lives – only we know by hearing that such a state of things exists. But as for quitting the country because of that – well, no, I could not be bought back to the East after knowing this glorious climate. Why, Tillie and I have picked out a tree to be buried under – a magnificent fellow that grows on the plateau above our house – just high enough to view the Four-mile Park from. She is as much in love with the freedom of these hills as I am."

"Poor child!" said his sister, commiseratingly; "to think of her being exiled in that park, twenty miles from a white woman! – didn't you say it was twenty?"

"Yes," and her brother leaned his back against the tree and smiled down at her; "it's twenty and a half, and the white woman whom you see at the end of the trip keeps a tavern – runs it herself, and sells the whisky that crosses the bar with an insinuating manner that is all her own. I've heard that she can sling an ugly fist in a scrimmage. She is a great favorite with the boys; the pet name they have for her is Holland Jin."

"Ugh! Horrible! And she – she allows them to call her so?"

"Certainly; you see it is a trade-mark for the house; her real name is Jane Holland."

"Holland Jin!" repeated his sister with a shudder. "Tillie, come here! Have you heard this? Hen has been telling me of your neighbor, Holland Jin. How do you expect to live always in this out-of-the-way place?"

Out from under the branches where their camp had just been located came Tillie, a charmingly plain little wife of less than a year – just her childishly curved red lips and her soft dark eyes to give attractiveness to her tanned face.

"Yes, I have heard of her," she said in a slow, half-shy way; "she can't be very – very – nice; but one of the stockmen said she was good-hearted if anyone was sick or needed help, so she can't be quite bad."

"You dear little soul," said her sister-in-law fondly; "you would have a good word to say for anyone; but you must allow it will be awfully dismal out here without any lady friends."

"You are here, and Rache."

"Yes, but when Rache and I have gone back to civilization?"

The dark eyes glanced at the speaker and then at the tall young ranchman. "Hen will be here always."

"Oh, you insinuating little Quaker!" laughed the older woman; "one would think you were married yesterday and the honeymoon only begun, would you not, Alec? I wonder if these Chinook winds have a tendency to softening of the brain – have they, Hen? If so, you and Tillie are in a dangerous country. What was it you shot this time, Alec – a pole-cat or a flying-squirrel? Yes, I'll go and see for myself."

And she followed her husband across the open space of the plateau to where Ivans was cutting slices of venison from the latest addition to their larder; while Hardy stood smiling down, half amusedly, at the flushed face of the little wife.

"Are you afraid of softening of the brain?" he asked in a tone of concern. She shook her head, but did not look up. She was easily teased, as much so about her husband as if he was still a wooer. And to have shown her fondness in his sister's eyes! What sister could ever yet see the reason for a sister-in-law's blind adoration?

"Are you going to look on yourself as a martyr after the rest have left you here in solitary confinement with me as a jailer?"

Another shake of the head, and the drooped eyes were raised for one swift glance.

"Because I was thinking," continued her tormentor – "I was thinking that if the exile, as Clara calls it, would be too severe on you, I might, if it was for your own good – I might send you back with the rest to Kentucky."

Then there was a raising of the head quick enough and a tempestuous flight across the space that separated them, and a flood of remonstrances that ended in happy laughter, a close clasp of arms, and – yes, in spite of the girl who was standing not very far away – a kiss; and Hardy circled his wife's shoulders with his long arms, and, with a glance of laughing defiance at his cousin, drew her closer and followed in the wake of the Houghtons.

The girl had deliberately stood watching that little scene with a curious smile in her eyes, a semi-cynical gaze at the lingering fondness of voice and touch. There was no envy in her face, only a sort of good-natured disbelief. Her cousin Clara always averred that Rachel was too masculine in spirit to ever understand the little tendernesses that burnish other women's lives.

CHAPTER IV.
BANKED FIRES

She did not look masculine, however, as she stood there, slender, and brown from the tan of the winds; the unruly, fluffy hair clustering around a face and caressing a neck that was essentially womanly in every curve; only, slight as the form seemed, one could find strong points in the depth of chest and solid look of the shoulders; a veteran of the roads would say those same points in a bit of horse-flesh would denote capacity for endurance, and, added to the strong-looking hand and the mockery latent in the level eyes, they completed a personality that she had all her life heard called queer. And with a smile that reflected that term, she watched those two married lovers stroll arm in arm to where the freshly-killed deer lay. Glancing at the group, she missed the face of their guide, a face she had seen much of since that sunrise in the Kootenai. Across the sward a little way the horses were picketed, and Mowitza's graceful head was bent in search for the most luscious clusters of the bunch-grass; but Mowitza's master was not to be seen. She had heard him speak, the night before, of signs of grizzlies around the shank of the mountain, and wondered if he had started on a lone hunt for them. She was conscious of a half-resentful feeling that he had not given her a chance of going along, when he knew she wanted to see everything possible in this out-of-door life in the

hills.

So, in some ill-humor, she walked aimlessly across the grass where Clara's lecture on the conventionalities had been delivered; and pushing ahead under the close-knit boughs, she was walking away from the rest, led by that spirit of exploration that comes naturally to one in a wilderness, and parting a wide-spreading clump of laurel, was about to wedge her way through it, when directly on the other side of that green wall she saw Genesee, whom she had supposed was alone after a grizzly. Was he asleep? He was lying face downward under the woven green roof that makes twilight in the cedars. The girl stopped, about to retrace her steps quietly, when a sudden thought made her look at him more closely, with a devout prayer in her heart that he *was* asleep, and asleep soundly; for her quick eyes had measured the short distance between that resting-place and the scene of the conversation of a few minutes ago. She tried wildly to remember what Clara had said about him, and, most of all, what answers Clara had received. She had no doubt said things altogether idiotic, just from a spirit of controversy, and here the man had been within a few feet of them all the time! She felt like saying something desperately, expressively masculine; but instead of easing her feelings in that manner, she was forced to complete silence and a stealthy retreat.

Was he asleep, or only resting? The uncertainty was aggravating. And a veritable Psyche, she could not resist the temptation of taking a last, sharp look. She leaned forward ever

so little to ascertain, and thus lost her chance of retreating unseen; for among the low-hanging branches was one on which there were no needles of green – a bare, straggling limb with twigs like the fingers of black skeletons. In bending forward, she felt one of them fasten itself in her hair; tugging blindly and wildly, at last she loosened their impish clutches, and left as trophy to the tree some erratic, light-brown hair and – she gave up in despair as she saw it – her cap, that swung backward and forward, just out of reach.

If it only staid there for the present, she would not care so much; but it was so tantalizingly insecure, hanging by a mere thread, and almost directly above the man. Fascinated by the uncertainty, she stood still. Would it stay where it was? Would it fall?

The silent query was soon answered – it fell, dropped lightly down on the man's shoulder, and he, raising his head from the folded arms, showed a face from which the girl took a step back in astonishment. He had not been asleep, then; but to the girl's eyes he looked like a man who had been either fighting or weeping. She had never seen a face so changed, telling so surely of some war of the emotions. He lay in the shadow, one hand involuntarily lifting itself as a shade for his eyes while he looked up at her.

"Well!" The tone was gruff, almost hoarse; it was as unlike him as his face at that moment, and Rachel Hardy wondered, blankly, if he was drunk – it was about the only reasonable

explanation she could give herself. But even with that she could not be satisfied; there was too much quick anger at the thought – not anger alone, but a decided feeling of disappointment in the man. To be sure, she had been influenced by no one to have faith in him; still – someway —

"Are you – are you ill, Mr. Genesee?" she asked at last.

"Not that I know of."

What a bear the man was! she thought; what need was there to answer a civil question in that tone. It made her just antagonistic enough not to care so much if his feelings had been hurt by Clara's remarks, and she asked bluntly:

"Have you been here long?"

"Some time."

"Awake?"

"Well, yes," and he made a queer sound in his throat, half grunt, half laugh; "I reckon I – was – awake."

The slow, half-bitter words impelled her to continue:

"Then you – you heard the – the conversation over there?"

He looked at her, and she thought his eyes were pretty steady for a drunken man's.

"Well, yes," he repeated, "I reckon – I – heard it."

All her temper blazed up at the deliberate confession. If he had seemed embarrassed or wounded, she would have felt sorry; but this stoicism angered her, as the idea of drunkenness had done – perhaps because each set herself and her feelings aside – I do not know, but that may have been the reason; she was a

woman.

"And you deliberately lay there and listened," she burst out wrathfully, "and let us say all sorts of things, no doubt, when it was your place as a gentleman to let us know you were here? I – I would not have taken you for an eavesdropper, Mr. Jack Genesee!" And with this tirade she turned to make her way back through the laurel.

"Here!"

She obeyed the command in his voice, thinking, as she did so, how quick the man was to get on his feet. In a stride he was beside her, his hand outstretched to stop her; but it was not necessary, his tone had done that, and he thrust both hands into the pockets of his hunting coat.

"Stop just where you are for a minute, Miss," he said, looking down at her; "and don't be so infernally quick about making a judge and jury of yourself – and you look just now as if you'd like to be sheriff, too. I make no pretense of being a gentleman of culture, so you can save yourself the trouble of telling me the duty of one. What little polish I ever had has been knocked off in ten years of hill life out here. I'm not used to talking to ladies, and my ways may seem mighty rough to you; but I want you to know I wasn't listening – I would have got away if I could, but I – was paralyzed."

"What?" Her tone was coldly unbelieving.

His manner was collected enough now. He was talking soberly, if rather brusquely; but – that strange look in his face at

first? and the eyes that burned as if for the lack of tears? – those were things not yet understood.

"Yes," he continued, "that's what I was, I reckon. I heard what she said; she is right, too, when she says I'm no fit company for a lady. I hadn't thought of it before, and it started me to thinking – thinking fast – and I just lay still there and forgot everything only those words; and then I heard the things you said – mighty kind they were, too, but I wasn't thinking of them much – only trying to see myself as people of your sort would see me if they knew me as I do, and I concluded I would pan out pretty small; then I heard something else that was good for me, but bitter to take. And then – " His voice grew uncertain; he was not looking at the girl, but straight ahead of him, his features softened, his eyes half closed at some memory.

"And then what, Genesee?" She felt a little sorry for him as he was speaking – a little kinder since he had owned his own unworthiness. A touch of remorse even led her to lay a couple of fingers on the sleeve of his coat, to remind him of her presence as she repeated: "And then?"

He glanced down at the fingers – the glance made the hand drop to her side very quickly – and then he coolly brushed his sleeve carefully with the other hand.

"Then for a little bit I was let get a glimpse of what heaven on earth might mean to a man, if he hadn't locked the door against himself and dropped into hell instead. This is a blind trail I'm leading on, is it, Miss? – all *tsolo*. Well, it doesn't matter;

you would have to drop into a pretty deep gulch yourself before you could understand, and you'll never do that – the Almighty forbid!" he added, energetically. "You belong to the mountains and the high places, and you're too sure-footed not to stay there. You can go now. I only stopped you to say that my listening mightn't have been in as mean a spirit as you judged. Judging things you don't understand is bad business anyway – let it alone."

With that admonition he turned away, striding through the laurel growth and spruce, and on down the mountain, leaving Miss Hardy feeling more lectured and astonished than she had often been in her life.

"Well, upon my word!"

It is not an original exclamation – she was not equal to any original thought just then; but for some time after his disappearance that was all she could find to say, and she said it standing still there, bare-headed and puzzled; then, gathering up her faculties and her skirts, she made her way back through the low growth, and sat down where Clara and herself had sat only a little while before.

"And Clara says he doesn't talk!" she soliloquized, with a faint smile about her lips. "Not talk! – he did not give me a chance to say a word, even if I had wanted to. I feel decidedly 'sat upon,' as Hen would say, and I suppose I deserved it."

Then she missed her cap, and went to look for it; but it was gone. She remembered seeing it in his hand; he must have forgotten and taken it with him. Then she sat down again, and all

the time his words, and the way he had said them, kept ringing in her head – "Judging things you don't understand is bad business."

Of course he was right; but it seemed strange for her to be taken to task by a man like that on such a subject – an uncouth miner and hunter in the Indian hills. But was he quite uncouth? While he made her stop and listen, his earnestness had overleaped that slurred manner of speech that belongs to the ignorant of culture. His words had been clearer cut. There had been the ring of finished steel in his voice, not the thud of iron in the ore, and it had cut clear a path of revelations. The man, then, could do more than ride magnificently, and look a Launcelot in buckskin – he could think – how deeply and wildly had been shown by the haggard face she had seen. But the cause of it? Even his disjointed explanation had given her no clue.

"*Tsolo*," she thought, repeating the Chinook word he had used; "that means to lose one's way – to wander in the dark. Well, he was right. That is what I am doing"; and then she laughed half mockingly at herself as she added: "And Mr. Jack Genesee has started me on the path – and started me bare-headed. Oh, dear, what a muddle! I wonder where my cap is, and I wonder where the man went to, and I wonder – I wonder what he meant by a glimpse of heaven. I haven't seen any signs of it."

But she had seen it – seen it and laughed mockingly, unbelievingly, while the man had by the sight been touched into a great heart-ache of desolation. And yet it was a commonplace thing they had seen; only two lives bound together by the wish of

their hearts and a wedding ring – an affection so honest that its fondness could be frankly shown to the world.

That evening Genesee came back to camp looking tired, and told Ivans there was a grizzly waiting to be skinned in a gully not far off. He had had a hard tussle after it and was too tired to see to the pelt; and then he turned to Miss Hardy and drew her cap from his pocket.

"I picked it up back there in the brush, and forgot to give it to you before going out," he said.

That was all – no look or manner that showed any remembrance of their conversation. And for the next two days the girl saw very little of their guide; no more long gallops ahead of the party. Mr. Genesee had taken a sedate turn, and remained close to the rest, and if any of the ladies received more of his attention than another it was Mrs. Hardy.

He had for her something approaching veneration. In her tender, half-shy love of her husband she seemed to him as the Madonna to those of the Roman church – a symbol of something holy – of a purity of affection unknown to the rough man of the hills. Unpretentious little Tillie would have been amazed if she had suspected the pedestal she occupied in the imagination of this dark-faced fellow, whose only affection seemed to be lavished on Mowitza. Clara always looked at him somewhat askance; and in passing a party of the Indians who were berry-hunting in the mountains, she noted suspiciously his ready speech in their own language, and the decided deference paid him by

them; the stolid stare of the squaws filled her with forebodings of covetousness for her raiment – of which several of them rather stood in need, though the weather *was* warm – and that night was passed by her in waking dreams of an Indian massacre, with their guide as a leader of the enemy.

"Do you know them very well?" asked Miss Hardy, riding up to Genesee. "Is it entirely Chinook they are talking? Let me try my knowledge of it. I should like to speak to them in their jargon. Can I?"

"You can try. Here's a Siwash, a friend of mine, who is as near a Boston (American) man as any of them – try him."

And, under Genesee's tuition, she asked several questions about the berry yield in the hills, and the distance to markets where pelts could be sold; and the Indian answered briefly, expressing distance as much by the sweep of his hand toward the west as by the adjective "*siah-si-ah*;" and Miss Hardy, well satisfied with her knowledge, would have liked to add to her possessions the necklace of bear's claws that adorned the bronze throat of the gentleman who answered her questions.

The squaws slouched around the camp, curious and dirty, here and there a half-breed showing the paler blood through olive skin. The younger women or girls were a shade less repulsive than their mothers, but none showed material for a romance of Indian life. They were as spiritless as ill-kept cattle.

Back of some tethered ponies Miss Hardy noticed a dark form dodging as if to avoid being seen. A squaw possessed of shyness

was such a direct contradiction of those she had seen, that the white girl found herself watching the Indian one with a sort of curiosity – in fact, she rode her horse over in the direction of the ponies, thinking the form she had a glimpse of was only a child; but it was not, for back of the ponies it lay flat to the ground as a snake, only the head raised, the eyes meeting those of Miss Hardy with a half scowl, and the bright-beaded dress outlining the form of a girl perhaps twenty years old, and dressed much neater than any she had seen in the camp. By the light tinge of color she was evidently a half-breed, and the white girl was about to turn her horse's head, when, with a low exclamation, the other seized a blanket that had slipped from a pony, and quick as a flash had rolled her plump form in it, head and heels, and dropped like one asleep, face downward, in the trampled grass.

Wondering at the sudden hiding and its cause, Miss Hardy turned away and met Genesee, who was riding toward her.

"Shaky-looking stock," he commented, supposing she was looking at the ponies. "The rest are going on, Miss; we have to do some traveling to reach our last camp by night-fall."

As they rode away, Miss Hardy turned for a last look at that mummy-looking form by the ponies. It apparently had not moved. She wondered if it was Genesee the girl was hiding from, and if so, why? Was their guide one of those heroes of the border whose face is a thing of terror to Indian foe? And was the half-breed girl one of the few timid ones? She could not answer her own questions, and something kept her from speaking to Genesee

of it; in fact, she did not speak to him of anything with the same freedom since that conversation by the laurel bushes.

Sometimes she would laugh a little to herself as she thought of how he had brushed off that coat-sleeve; it had angered her, amused her, and puzzled her. That entire scene seemed a perplexing, unreal sort of an affair to her sometimes, especially when looking at their guide as he went about the commonplace duties in the camp or on the trail. An undemonstrative, prosaic individual she knew he appeared to the rest; laconic and decided when he did speak, but not a cheery companion. To her always, after that day, he was a suggestion of a crater in which the fires were banked.

CHAPTER V.
AT LAST CAMP

After their stop at the Indian camp, which Genesee explained was a berrying crowd from the Kootenai tribe, there was, of course, comment among the visitors as to the mixed specimens of humanity they had seen there.

"I don't wonder a white man is ashamed of an Indian wife," said Mrs. Houghton. "What slouchy creatures!"

"All the more reason for a white man to act the part of missionary, and marry them," remarked Rachel Hardy, "and teach them what the domestic life of a woman should be."

Genesee turned square around to look at the speaker – perhaps she did not strike him as being a domestic woman herself. Whatever the cause of that quick attention, she noticed it, and added: "Well, Mr. Genesee, don't you think so? You must have seen considerable of that sort of life."

"I have – some," he answered concisely, but showing no disposition to discuss it, while Mrs. Houghton was making vain efforts to engage Miss Hardy's attention by the splendid spread of the country below them; but it was ineffectual.

"Yes, Clara, I see the levels along that river – I've been seeing them for the past two hours – but just now I am studying the social system of those hills"; and then she turned again to their guide. "You did not answer my question, Mr. Genesee," she said,

ignoring Mrs. Houghton's admonishing glances. "Do you not agree with my idea of marriages between whites and Indians?"

"No!" he said bluntly; "most of the white men I know among the Indians need themselves to be taught how people should live; they need white women to teach them. It's uphill work showing an Indian how to live decently when a man has forgotten how himself. Missionary work! Squaw men are about as fit for that as – as hell's fit for a powder-house."

And under this emphatic statement and the shocked expression of Clara's face, Miss Hardy collapsed, with the conviction that there must be lights and shades of life in the Indian country that were not apparent to the casual visitor. She wondered sometimes that Genesee had lived there so long with no family ties, and she seldom heard him speak of any white friend in Montana – only of old Davy MacDougall sometimes. Most of his friends had Indian names. Altogether, it seemed a purposeless sort of existence.

"Do you expect to live your life out here, like this?" she asked him once. "Don't you ever expect to go back home?"

"Hardly! There is nothing to take me back now."

"And only a horse and a gun to keep you here?" she smiled.

"N – no; something besides, Miss. I've got a right smart of a ranch on the other side of the Maple range. It's running wild – no stock on it; but in Tamahnous Hill there's a hole I've been digging at for the past four years. MacDougall reckons I'm 'witched' by it, but it may pan out all right some of these days."

"Gold hunting?"

"No, Miss, silver; and it's there. I've got tired more than once and given it the *klatawa* (the go-by); but I'd always come back, and I reckon I always will until I strike it."

"And then?"

"Well, I haven't got that far yet."

And thus any curiosity about the man's life or future was generally silenced. He had told her many things of the past; his life in the mines of Colorado and Idaho, with now and then the diversion of a government scout's work along the border. All of that he would speak of without reserve, but of the actual present or of the future he would say nothing.

"I have read somewhere in a book of a man without a past," remarked the girl to Mrs. Hardy; "but our guide seems a man utterly without a future."

"Perhaps he does not like to think of it here alone," suggested Tillie thoughtfully; "he must be very lonely sometimes. Just see how he loves that horse!"

"Not a horse, Tillie – a *klootchman kiuatan*," corrected the student of Chinook; "If you are going to live out here, you must learn the language of the hills."

"You are likely to know it first;" and then, after a little, she added: "But noticing that man's love for his Mowitza, I have often thought how kind he would be to a wife. I think he has a naturally affectionate nature, though he does swear – I heard him; and to grow old and wild here among the Indians and squaw men seems

too bad. He is intelligent – a man who might accomplish a great deal yet. You know he is comparatively young – thirty-five, I heard Hen say."

"Yes," said Mrs. Houghton sarcastically; "a good age at which to adopt a child. You had better take him back as one of the fixtures on the ranch, Tillie; of course he may need some training in the little courtesies of life, but no doubt Rachel would postpone her return East and offer her services as tutor;" and with this statement Mistress Houghton showed her disgust of the entire subject.

"She is 'riled,'" said the girl, looking quizzically after the plump retreating form.

"Why, what in the world – "

"Nothing in the world, Tillie, and that's what's the matter with Clara. Her ideas of the world are, and always will be, bounded by the rules and regulations of Willow Centre, Kentucky. Of course it isn't to be found on a map of the United States, but it's a big place to Clara; and she doesn't approve of Mr. Genesee because he lives outside its knowledge. She intimated yesterday that he might be a horse-thief for any actual acquaintance we had with his resources or manner of living."

"Ridiculous!" laughed Tillie. "That man!"

The girl slipped her arm around the little wife's waist and gave her a hug like a young bear. She had been in a way lectured and snubbed by that man, but she bore no malice.

The end of their *cultus corrie* was reached as they went into

camp for a two-days' stay, on the shoulder of a mountain from which one could look over into the Idaho hills, north into British Columbia, and through the fair Kootenai valleys to the east, where the home-ranch lay.

Houghton and Hardy each had killed enough big game to become inoculated with the taste for wild life, and the ladies were delighted with the idea of having the spoils of the hunt for the adornment of their homes; and altogether the trip was voted a big success.

Is there anything more appetizing, after a long ride through the mountains, than to rest under the cedars at sunset and hear the sizzle of broiled meat on the red coals, and have the aroma of coffee borne to you on the breeze that would lull you to sleep if you were not so hungry?

"I could have eaten five meals during every twenty-four hours since we started," acknowledged Rachel, as she watched with flattering attention the crisping slices of venison that were accumulating on a platter by the fire.

And she looked as if both the appetite and the wild living had agreed with her. Clara complained that Rachel really seemed to pride herself on the amount of tan she had been able to gather from the wind and the sun, while Hardy decided that only her light hair would keep her from being taken for an Indian.

But for all the looks that were gaining a tinge of wildness, and the appetites that would persist in growing ravenous, it was none the less a jolly, pleasant circle that gathered about the evening

meal, sometimes eaten on a large flat stone, if any were handy, and again on the grass, where the knives and small articles of table-ware would lose themselves in the tall spears; but, whatever was used as a table, the meal in the evening was the domestic event of the day. At midday there was often but a hasty lunch; breakfast was simply a preparation for travel; but in the evening all were prepared for rest and the enjoyment of either eatables or society. And until the darkness fell there was the review of the day's hunt by the men – Hardy and Houghton vying with each other in their recitals – or, as Ivans expressed it, "swappin' lies" – around the fire. Sometimes there would be singing, and blended with the notes of night-birds in the forest would sound the call of human throats echoing upward in old hymns that all had known sometime, in the East. And again Tillie would sing them a ballad or a love-song in a sweet, fresh voice; or, with Clara, Hardy, and Houghton, a quartette would add volume to some favorite, their scout a silent listener. Rachel never sang with the rest; she preferred whistling, herself. And many a time when out of sight of her on the trail, she was located by that boyish habit she had of echoing the songs of many of the birds that were new to her, learning their notes, and imitating them so well as to bring many a decoyed answer from the woods.

Between herself and the guide there was no more their former *comaraderie*. They had never regained their old easy, friendly manner. Still, she asked him that night at "last camp" of the music of the Indians. Had they any? Could he sing? Had there ever been

any of their music published? etc.

And he told them of the airs that were more like chants, like the echoes of whispering or moaning forests, set to human words; of the dusky throats that, without training, yet sang together with never a discord; of the love-songs that had in them the minor cadences of sadness. Only their war-songs seemed to carry brightness, and they only when echoes of victory.

In the low, glowing light of the fire, when the group around it faded in the darkness, he seemed to forget his many listeners, and talked on as if to only one. To the rest it was as if they had met a stranger there that evening for the first time, and found him entertaining. Even Mrs. Houghton dropped her slightly supercilious manner toward him, a change to which he was as indifferent as to her coolness. It may have been Tillie's home-songs in the evening that unlocked his lips; or it may have been the realization that the pleasure-trip was ended – that in a short time he would know these people no more, who had brought him home-memories in their talk of home-lives. It may have been a dash of recklessness that urged him to enjoy it for a little only – this association that suggested so much to which he had long been a stranger. Whatever the impulse was, it showed a side of his nature that only Rachel had gained any knowledge of through those first bright, eager days of their *cultus corrie*.

At Tillie's request he repeated some remembered fragments of Indian songs that had been translated into the Red's language, and of which he gave them the English version or meaning as

well as he could. A couple of them he knew entire, and to Tillie's delight he hummed the plaintive airs until she caught the notes. And even after the rest had quietly withdrawn and rolled themselves in blankets for the night's rest, Hardy and his wife and Genesee still sat there with old legends of *Tsiatko*, the demon of the night, for company, and with strange songs in which the music would yet sound familiar to any ears used to the shrilling of the winds through the timber, or the muffled moans of the wood-dove.

And in the sweet dusk of the night, Rachel, the first to leave the fire, lay among the odorous, spicy branches of the cedar and watched the picture of the group about the fire. All was in darkness, save when a bit of reflected red would outline form or feature, and they looked rather uncanny in the red-and-black coloring. An Indian council or the grouping of witches and warlocks it might have been, had one judged the scene only from sight. But the voices of the final three, dropped low though they were for the sake of the supposed sleepers, yet had a tone of pleasant converse that belied their impish appearance.

Those voices came to Rachel dreamily, merging their music with the drowsy odors of a spruce pillow. And through them all she heard Tillie and Genesee singing a song of some unlettered Indian poet:

"*Lemolo mika tsolo siah polaklie,*
Towagh tsee chil-chil siah saghallie.

Mika na chakko? – me sika chil-chil,
Opitsah! mika winapia,
Tsolo – tsolo!"

"Wild do I wander, far in the darkness,
Shines bright a sweet star far up above.
Will you not come to me? you are the star,
Sweetheart! I wait,
Lost! – in the dark!"

And the white girl's mouth curled dubiously in that smile that always vanquished the tender curves of her lips, and then dropped asleep whispering the refrain, "*Tsolo – tsolo!*"

CHAPTER VI.
TSOLO – TSOLO!

The retracing of steps, either figuratively or literally, is always provocative of thought to the individual who walks again over the old paths; the waning of a moon never finds the same state of feelings in the heart that had throbbed through it under the gold sickle. Back over how many a road do we walk with a sigh, remembering the laughter that had once echoed along it! Something has been gained, something has been lost, since; and a human sigh is as likely to be called forth by one cause as the other.

Miss Rachel Hardy, who usually laughed at sighs of sentiment, did not indulge in them as one by one the landmarks of the past three weeks rose in sight. But different natures find different vents for feeling, and she may have got rid of hers by the long gallops she took alone over the now known trail, priding herself on her ability to find her way miles ahead of the slower-moving party; and resting herself and horse in some remembered retreat, would await their coming.

Through these solitary rides she began to understand the fascination such a free, untrammeled existence would have for a man. One must feel a very Adam in the midst of this virginity of soil and life of the hills. She had not Tillie's domestic ideas of life, else the thought of an Eve might also have occurred to

her. But though she wasted no breath in sighs over the retraced *cultus corrie*, neither did she in the mockery that had tantalized Clara in the beginning. That lady did not find her self-imposed duty of chaperon nearly so arduous as at first, since, from the time the other ladies awakened to the fact that their guide had a good baritone voice and could be interesting, the girl forgot her role of champion, also her study of mongrel languages; for she dropped that ready use of Chinook of which she had been proud, especially in her conversation with him, and only used it if chance threw her in the way of Indians hunting or gathering *olallie* (berries) in the hills.

Genesee never noticed by word or action the changed manner that dropped him out of her knowledge. Once or twice, in crossing a bit of country that was in any way dangerous to a stranger, he had said no one must leave the party or go out of hearing distance; and though the order was a general one, they all knew he meant Rachel, and the ladies wondered a little if that generally headstrong damsel would heed it, or if she would want willfully to take the bit in her teeth and go as she pleased – a habit of hers; but she did not; she rode demurely with the rest, showing the respect of a soldier to the orders of a commander. Along the last bit of bad country he spoke to her of the enforced care through the jungle of underbrush, where the *chetwoot* (black bear) was likely to be met and prove a dangerous enemy, at places where the trail led along the edge of ravines, and where a fright to a horse was a risky thing.

"It's hard on you, Miss, to be kept back here with the rest of us," he said, half apologetically; "you're too used to riding free for this to be any pleasure, but – "

"Don't distress yourself about me," she answered easily, but without looking at him. "I have felt a little lazy to-day, so has Betty, and have been satisfied to loaf; but now we are at the edge of this bad strip, and just down over this bend ahead is a long stretch of level, and I think – yes, I am quite sure – I am ready now for a run."

And without waiting to hear either assent or dissent to her intention, she touched Betty with the whip, and Mowitza and her master were left behind, much to Mowitza's dissatisfaction. She gave one plunge ahead as if to follow, but Genesee's hand on the bridle had a quick, cruel grip for a moment, and in slow silence they made their way down the timbered slope to the lower levels. The girl, free from companionship save her own thoughts, galloped through the odorous, shadowy table-lands, catching here and there a glimpse of glistening water in a river ahead, as it trailed its length far below the plateaus, and shone like linked diamonds away toward the east.

She remembered the river; it was a branch of the Kootenai. To be near it meant but a short journey home; two days more, perhaps, and then – well, their outing would be over. She would go back East, and say good-bye to Betty; and then she began to think of that man who belonged to these hills and who never need leave them – never need go a mile without his horse, if

he did not choose; and she envied him as she could not have thought it possible to do six months before – to envy a man such a primitive existence, such simple possessions! But most human wants are so much a matter of association, and Rachel Hardy, though all unconscious of it, was most impressionable to surroundings. Back of her coolness and carelessness was a sensitive temperament in which the pulses were never stilled. It thrilled her with quick sympathies for which she was vexed with herself, and which she hid as well as she could. She had more than likely never tried to analyze her emotions; they were seldom satisfactory enough for her to grant them so much patience; but had she done so, she would have found her desires molded as much by association and sentiment as most other human nature of her age.

Once or twice she looked back as she left the timber, but could see nothing of the others, and Betty seemed to scent the trail home, and long for the ranch and the white-coated flocks of the pastures, for she struck out over the table-lands, where her hoofs fell so softly in the grass that the wild things of the ground-homes and the birds that rest on the warm earth scampered and flew from under the enemy's feet that were shod with iron. A small herd of elk with uncouth heads and monstrous antlers were startled from the shelter of a knoll around which she cantered; for a moment the natives and the stranger gazed at each other with equal interest, and then a great buck plunged away over the rolling land to the south, and the others followed as if they had

been given a word of command.

The girl watched them out of sight, finding them, like the most of Montana natives, strange and interesting – not only the natives, but the very atmosphere of existence, with its tinges of wildness and coloring of the earth; even the rising and setting of the sun had a distinct character of its own, in the rarefied air of this land that seemed so far off from all else in the world. For in the valley of the Kootenai, where the light breaks over the mountains of the east and vanishes again over the mountains of the west, it is hard at times to realize that its glory is for any land but the mellow, sun-kissed "park" whose only gates open to the south.

The late afternoon was coming on; only an hour or so of sun, and then the long flush twilight.

Remembering the camping-spot they were making for, she gave Betty rein, thinking to reach it and have a fire built on their arrival, and her hard ride gave her a longing for the sight of the pack-mules with the eatables.

Another of those ugly, jolting bits of scrub-timber had to be crossed before the haven of rest was reached. Betty had almost picked her way through it, when a huge black something came scrambling down through the brush almost in front of them. The little mare shied in terror, and the girl tried to make a circuit of the animal, which she could see was an enormous black bear. It did not seem to notice her, but was rolling and pitching downward as if on a trail – no doubt that of honey in a tree. Managing Betty was not an easy matter, and it took all of the

girl's strength to do so until the black stranger passed, and then, on loosening the bridle, the terrified beast gave a leap forward. There was a crash, a growl from under her feet, and an answering one from the huge beast that had just gone by them; she had been followed by two cubs that had escaped Rachel's notice in the thick brush, as all her attention had been given to the mother; but Betty's feet coming down on one of the cubs had brought forth a call that the girl knew might mean a war of extermination. With a sharp cut of the whip, Betty, wild from the clawing thing at her feet, sprang forward over it with a snort of terror, just as the mother with fierce growls broke through the brush.

Once clear of them, the little mare ran like mad through the rough trail over which she had picked her way so carefully but a little before. Stones and loose earth clattered down the gully, loosened by her flying feet, and dashed ominously in the mountain stream far below. The girl was almost torn from the saddle by the low branches of the trees under which she was borne. In vain she tried to check or moderate the mare's gait. She could do little but drop low on the saddle and hang there, wondering if she should be able to keep her seat until they got clear of the timber. The swish of some twigs across her eyes half blinded her, and it seemed like an hour went by with Betty crashing through the brush, guiding herself, and seeming to lose none of her fright. Her ears were deaf to the girl's voice, and at last, stumbling in her headlong run, her rider was thrown against a tree, knowing nothing after the sickening jar, and seeing nothing

of Betty, who, freed from her burden, recovered her footing, and, triumphant, dashed away on a *cultus* "*coolie*" (run) of her own.

When Rachel recovered her powers of reasoning, she felt too lazy, too tired to use them. She ached all over from the force of the fall, and though realizing that the sun was almost down, and that she was alone there in the timber, all she felt like doing was to drag herself into a more comfortable position and go to sleep; but real sleep did not come easily – only a drowsy stupor, through which she realized she was hungry, and wondered if the rest were eating supper by that time, and if they had found Betty, and if – no, rather, when would they find her?

She had no doubt just yet that they would find her; she could half imagine how carefully and quickly Mowitza would cover the ground after they missed her. Of course there were other horses in the party, but Mowitza was the only one she happened to think of. She did not know where she was; the mare had struck into a new trail for herself, and had dropped her rider on a timbered slope of one of the foot-hills, where there were no remembered landmarks, and the closeness of night would prevent her from seeking them.

Twice she roused herself and tried to walk, but she was dizzily sick from the wild ride and the fall that had stunned her, and both times she was compelled to drop back on her couch of grass. The stars began to creep out in the clear, warm sky, and up through the timber the shadows grew black, and it all seemed very peaceful and very lovely. She thought she would not mind

sleeping there if she only had a blanket, and – yes, some hot coffee – for through the shadows of the lower hills the dew falls quickly, and already the coolness made itself felt with a little shiver. She searched her pocket for some matches – not a match, therefore no fire.

A sound in the distance diverted her thoughts from disappointment, and she strained her ears for a repetition of it. Surely it was a shot, but too far off for any call of hers to answer it. She could do nothing but listen and wait, and the waiting grew long, so long that she concluded it could be no one on her trail – perhaps some of the Indians in the hills. She would be glad to see even them, she thought, for all she met had seemed kindly disposed.

Then she fell to wondering about that half-breed girl who had hid back of the ponies; was it Genesee she was afraid of, and if so, why?

Suddenly a light gleamed through the woods above her; a bent figure was coming down the hill carrying a torch, and back of it a horse was following slowly.

"Genesee!" called a glad voice through the dusk. "Genesee!"

There was no word in answer; only the form straightened, and with the torch held high above his head he plunged down through the trees, straight as an arrow, in answer to her voice.

She had risen to her feet, but swayed unsteadily as she went to meet him.

"I am so glad – it – is – you," she said, her hands outstretched

as he came close. And then that returning dizziness sent her staggering forward, half on her knees and half in his arms, as he threw the torch from him and caught her.

She did not faint, though the only thing she was still conscious of was that she was held in strong arms, and held very closely, and the beat of a heart that was not her own throbbed against her rather nerveless form. He had not yet spoken a word, but his breath coming quickly, brokenly, told of great exhaustion, or it may be excitement.

Opening her eyes, she looked up into the face that had a strange expression in the red light from the torch – his eyes seemed searching her own so curiously.

"I – I'm all right," she half smiled in answer to what she thought an unspoken query, "only" – and a wave of forgetfulness crept over the estrangement of the late days – and she added – "only —*Hyas till nika*" (I am very tired).

Her eyes were half closed in the content of being found, and the safety of his presence. She had not changed her position or noticed that he had not spoken. His hat had fallen to the ground, and something almost boyish was in the bend of his bared head and the softness of his features as his face drooped low over her own. Death brings back the curves of youth to aged faces sometimes – is it the only change that does so?

She felt the hand on her shoulder trembling; was it with her weight – and he so strong? A muttered sentence came to her ears, through which she could only distinguish a word that in its

suppressed force might belong to either a curse or a prayer – an intense "Christ!"

That aroused her to a realization of what she had been too contented to remember. She opened her eyes and raised her head from his arm, brushing his lips with her hair as she did so.

"Were you so much alarmed?" she asked in a clearer, more matter-of-fact way, as she propped herself up on his outstretched arm; "and did you come alone to find me?"

He drew back from her with a long, indrawn breath, and reached for his hat.

"Yes," he said.

It was the first time he had spoken to her, and he did so with his eyes still on her face and that curious expression in them. He was half kneeling, his body drawn back and away from her, but his eyes unchanging in their steadiness. As the girl lay there full length on the mountain grass, only her head raised and turned toward him, she might have been a Lamia from their attitudes and his expression.

"It seemed long to wait," she continued, turning her eyes toward Mowitza, who had quietly come near them; "but I was not afraid. I knew you would find me. I would have walked back to meet you if the fall had not made me so dizzy. I am decidedly *wake kloshe*" (no good); and she smiled as she reached out her hand to him, and he helped her rise to her feet. "I feel all jolted to pieces," she said, taking a few steps toward a tree against which she leaned. "And even now that you have come, I don't know how

I am to get to camp."

"I will get you there," he answered briefly. "Did the mare throw you?"

"I am not sure what she did," answered the girl. "She fell, I think, and I fell with her, and when I could see trees instead of stars she had recovered and disappeared. Oh! Did you see the bear?"

"Yes, and shot her. She might have killed you when her temper was up over that cub. How did it happen?"

Each of them was a little easier in speech than at first, and she told him as well as she could of the episode, and her own inability to check Betty. And he told her of the fright of the others, and their anxiety, and that he had sent them straight ahead to camp, while he struck into the timber where Betty had left the old trail.

"I promised them to have word of you soon," he added; "and I reckon they'll be mighty glad you can take the word yourself – it's more than they expected. She might have killed you."

His tone and repetition of the words showed the fear that had been uppermost in his thoughts.

"Yes – she might," agreed the girl. "That is a lesson to me for my willfulness;" and then she smiled mockingly with a gleam of her old humor, adding: "And so in the future, for the sake of my neck and the safety of my bones, I will be most obedient to orders, Mr. Genesee Jack."

He only looked at her across the flickering circle of light from the torch. It must have dazzled his eyes, for in putting on his hat

he pulled it rather low over his forehead, and turning his back abruptly on her he walked over for Mowitza.

But he did not bring her at once. He stood with his elbows on her shoulders and his head bent over his clasped hands, like a man who is thinking – or else very tired.

Rachel had again slipped down beside the tree; her head still seemed to spin around a little if she stood long; and from that point of vantage she could easily distinguish the immovable form in the shifting lights and shadows.

"What is the matter with the man?" she asked herself as he stood there. "He was glad to find me – I know it; and why he should deliberately turn his back and walk away like that, I can't see. But he shan't be cool or sulky with me ever again; I won't let him."

And with this determination she said:

"Genesee!"

"Yes," he answered, but did not move.

"Now that you have found me, are you going to leave me here all night?" she asked demurely.

"No, Miss," he answered, and laid his hand on the bridle. "Come, Mowitza, we must take her to camp;" and striding back with quick, decided movements that were rather foreign to his manner, he said:

"Here she is, Miss; can you ride on that saddle?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I – I – suppose so; but how are you to get there?"

"Walk," he answered concisely.

"Why, how far is it?"

"About five miles – straight across."

"Can we go straight across?"

"No."

She looked up at him and laughed, half vexed.

"Mr. Genesee Jack," she remarked, "you can be one of the most aggravatingly non-committal men I ever met. It has grown as dark as a stack of black cats, and I know we must have an ugly trip to make with only one horse between us. Do you suppose I have no natural curiosity as to how we are to get there, and when? Don't be such a lock-and-key individual. I can't believe it is natural to you. It is an acquired habit, and hides your real self often."

"And a good thing it does, I reckon," he returned; "locks and keys are good things to have, Miss; don't quarrel with mine or my ways to-night; wait till I leave you safe with your folks, then you can find fault or laugh, whichever you please. It won't matter then."

His queer tone kept her from answering at once, and she sat still, watching him adjust the stirrup, and then make a new torch of pine splits and knots.

"What do you call a torch in Chinook?" she asked after a little, venturing on the supposed safe ground of jargon.

"*La gome towagh*," he answered, splitting a withe to bind them together, and using a murderous looking hunting-knife on which

the light glimmered and fretted.

"And a knife?" she added.

"*Opitsah.*"

She looked up at him quickly. "*Opitsah* means sweetheart," she returned; "I know that much myself. Are you not getting a little mixed, Professor?"

"I think not," he said, glancing across at her; "the same word is used for both; and," he added, thrusting the knife in its sheath and rising to his feet, "I reckon the men who started the jargon knew what they were talking about, too. Come, are you ready?"

Assuredly, though he had hunted for her, and been glad to find her alive, yet now that he had found her he had no fancy for conversation, and he showed a decided inclination to put a damper on her attempts at it. He lifted her to the saddle, and walking at Mowitza's head, they started on their home journey through the night.

"The moon will be up soon," he remarked, glancing up at the sky. "We only need a torch for the gulch down below there."

She did not answer; the movement of the saddle brought back the dizziness to her head – all the glare of the torch was a blur before her. She closed her eyes, thinking it would pass away, but it did not, and she wondered why he stalked on like that, just as if he did not care, never once looking toward her or noticing how she was dropping forward almost on Mowitza's neck. Then, as they descended a steep bit of hill, she became too much lost to her surroundings for even that speculation, and could only say

slowly:

"*Tsolo*, Genesee?"

"No," he answered grimly, "not now."

But she knew or heard nothing of the tone that implied more than it expressed. She could only reach gropingly toward him with one hand, as if to save herself from falling from the saddle. Only her finger-tips touched his shoulder – it might have been a drooping branch out of the many under which they went, for all the weight of it; but grim and unresponsive as he was in some ways, he turned, through some quick sympathy at the touch of her hand, and caught her arm as she was about to fall forward. In an instant she was lifted from the saddle to her feet, and his face was as white as hers as he looked at her.

"Dead!" he said, in a quiet sort of way, as her hand dropped nerveless from his own, and he lifted her in his arms, watching for some show of life in the closed lids and parted lips. And then with a great shivering breath, he drew the still face to his own, and in a half-motherly way smoothed back the fair hair as if she had been a child, whispering over and over: "Not dead, my pretty! not you, my girl! Here, open your eyes; listen to me; don't leave me like this until I tell you – tell you – God! I wish I was dead beside you! Ah, my girl! my girl!"

CHAPTER VII.
UNDER THE CHINOOK MOON

Ikt polaklie konaway moxt

Over the crowns of the far hills the moon wheeled slowly up into the sky, giving the shadows a cloak of blue mist, and vying with the forgotten torch in lighting up the group in the gulch. The night winds rustled through the leaves and sighed through the cedars; and the girl's voice, scarcely louder than the whispers of the wood, said: "Genesee! Tillie!"

"Yes, Miss," the man answered, as he lowered her head from his shoulder to the sward, making a pillow for her of his hat. With returning life and consciousness she again slipped out of his reach or possession, and himself and his emotions were put aside, to be hidden from her eyes.

Through the blessing of death, infinite possession comes to so many souls that life leaves beggared; and in those hurried moments of uncertainty, she belonged to him more fully than he could hope for while she lived.

"Is it you, Genesee?" she said, after looking at him drowsily for a little. "I – I thought Tillie was here, crying, and kissing me."

"No, Miss, you fainted, I reckon, and just dreamed that part

of it," he answered, but avoiding the eyes that, though drowsy, looked so directly at him.

"I suppose so," she agreed. "I tried to reach you when I felt myself going; but you wouldn't look around. Did you catch me?"

"Yes; and I don't think you were quite square with me back there; you told me you were all right; but you must have got hurt more than you owned up to. Why didn't you tell me?"

"But I am not – indeed I am not!" she persisted. "I was not at all injured except for the jar of the fall; it leaves me dizzy and sick when I sit upright in the saddle – that is all."

"And it is enough," he returned decidedly; "do you 'spose, if you'd told me just how you felt, I should have set you there to ride through these hills and hollows?"

"What else could you do?" she asked; "you couldn't bring a carriage for me."

"May be not, but I could have ridden Mowitza myself and carried you."

"That would be funny," she smiled. "Poor Mowitza! could she carry double?"

"Yes," he answered curtly; perhaps the situation did not strike him in a humorous light. "Yes, she can, and that's what she will have to do. Let me know when you feel able to start."

"I think I do now," she said, raising herself from the ground; "I am a little shaky, but if I do not have to sit upright I can keep my wits about me, I believe. Will you help me, please?"

He lifted her into the saddle without a word, and then

mounting himself, he took her in front of him, circling her with one arm and guiding Mowitza with the other, with as much unconcern as if he had carried damsels in like cavalier fashion all his life.

They rode on in silence for a little through the shadows of the valley, where the moon's light only fell in patches. His eyes were straight ahead, on the alert for gullies and pitfalls along the blind trail. He seemed to have no glances for the girl whose head was on his shoulder, but whom he held most carefully. Once he asked how she felt, and if she was comfortable; and she said "Yes, thank you," very demurely, with that mocking smile about her lips. She felt like laughing at the whole situation – all the more so because he looked so solemn, almost grim. She always had an insane desire to laugh when in circumstances where any conventional woman would be gathering up her dignity. It had got her into scrapes often, and she felt as if it was likely to do so now. The movement of the horse no longer made her ill, since she did not have to sit upright; she was only a little dizzy at times, as if from the rocking of a swing, and lazily comfortable with that strong arm and shoulder for support.

"I am afraid I am getting heavy," she remarked after a while; "if I could get my arm around back of you and hold either the saddle or reach up to your shoulder, I might not be such a dead weight on your arm."

"Just as you like," was the brief reply that again aroused her desire to laugh. It did seem ridiculous to be forced into a man's

arms like that, and the humorous part of it was heightened, in her eyes, by his apparent sulkiness over the turn affairs had taken.

She slipped her arm across his back, however, and up to his shoulder, thus lightening her weight on the arm that circled her, an attempt to which he appeared indifferent. And so they rode on out of the valley into the level land at the foot of the hills, and then into the old trail where the route was more familiar and not so much care needed.

The girl raised her head drowsily as she noted some old landmarks in the misty light.

"Poor Mowitza!" she said; "she did not have such a load when she came over this road before; it was the day after you joined us, do you remember?"

"Yes."

Remember! It had been the gateway through which he had gained a glimpse into a new world – those days that were tinged with the delightful suggestions of dawn. He smiled rather grimly at the question, but she could not see his face very well, under the shadow of his wide hat.

"Has Mowitza ever before had to carry double?"

There was a little wait after her question – perhaps he was trying to remember; then he said:

"Yes."

She wanted to ask who, and under what circumstances, but someway was deterred by his lock-and-key manner, as she called it. She rather commended herself for her good humor under

its influence, and wondered that she only felt like laughing at his gruffness. With any other person she would have felt like retaliating, and she lay there looking up into the shadowy face with a mocking self-query as to why he was made an exception of.

"Genesee!" she began, after one of those long spells of silence; and then the utterance of the name suggested a new train of thought – "by the way, is your name Genesee?"

He did not answer at once – was he trying to remember that also?

"I wish you would tell me," she continued, more gently than was usual with her. "I am going away soon; I should like to know by what real name I am to remember you when I am back in Kentucky. Is your name Jack Genesee?"

"No," he said at last; "Genesee is a name that stuck to me from some mines where I worked, south of this. If I went back to them I would be called Kootenai Jack, perhaps, because I came from here. Plenty of men are known by names out here that would not be recognized at home, if they have a home.

"But your name is Jack" she persisted.

"Yes, my name is Jack."

But he did not seem inclined to give any further information on the subject that just then was of interest to her, and she did not like to question further, but contented herself with observing:

"I shan't call you Genesee any more."

"Just as you like, Miss."

Again came that crazy desire of hers to laugh, and although she kept silent, it was a convulsive silence – one of heaving bosom and quivering shoulders. To hide it, she moved restlessly, changing her position somewhat, and glancing about her.

"Not much farther to go," she remarked; "won't they be surprised to find you carrying me into camp like this? I wonder if Betty came this way, or if they found her – the little vixen! There is only one more hill to cross until we reach camp – is there not?"

"Only one more."

"And both Mowitza and yourself will need a good rest when we get there," she remarked. "Your arm must feel paralyzed. Do you know I was just thinking if you had found me dead in that gulch, you would have had to carry me back over this trail, just like this. Ugh! What a dismal ride, carrying a dead woman!"

His arm closed around her quickly, and he drew a deep breath as he looked at her.

"I don't know," he said in a terse way, as if through shut teeth; "perhaps it wouldn't have been so dismal, for I might never have come back. I might have staid there – with you."

She could see his eyes plainly enough when he looked at her like that; even the shadows could not cover their warmth; they left little to be expressed in words, and neither attempted any. Her face turned away from him a little, but her hand slipped into the clasp of his fingers, and so they rode on in silence.

The brow of the last hill was reached. Down below them could be seen the faint light from the camp-fire, and for an

instant Mowitza was halted for a breathing-spell ere she began the descent. The girl glanced down toward the fire-light, and then up to his face.

"You can rest now," she said, with the old quizzical smile about her lips, even while her fingers closed on his own. "There is the camp; *alta nika wake tsolo*" (now you no longer wander in the dark).

But there was no answering smile on his face – not even at the pleasure of the language that at times had seemed a tacit bond between them. He only looked at her in the curious way she had grown accustomed to in him, and said:

"The light down there is for you; I don't belong to it. Just try and remember that after – after you are safe with your folks."

"I shall remember a great deal," returned the girl in her independent tone; "among other things, the man who brought me back to them. Now, why don't you say, 'Just as you like, Miss?' You ought to – to be natural."

But her raillery brought no more words from him. His face had again its sombre, serious look, and in silence he guided Mowitza's feet down toward the glow-light. Once a puff of wind sent the girl's hair blowing across her face, and he smoothed it back carefully that he might see her eyes in the moonlight; but the half-caress in the movement was as if given to a child. All the quick warmth was gone from his eyes and speech after that one comprehensive outbreak, and the girl was puzzled at the change that had come in its stead. He was so gentle, but so guarded –

the touch even of his fingers on her shoulder was tremulous, as if with the weight of resistance forced into them. She did not feel like laughing any longer, after they began the descent of the hill. His manner had impressed her too strongly with the feeling of some change to come with the end of that ride and the eventful moonlight night, but no words came to her; but her hand remained in his of its own accord, not because it was held there, and she lay very quiet, wondering if he would not speak – would say nothing more to her ere they joined the others, to whom they were moving nearer at every step.

He did not. Once his fingers closed convulsively over her own. His eyes straight ahead caused her to glance in that direction, and she saw Tillie and Hardy clearly, in the moonlight, walking together hand-in-hand down toward the glow of the camp-fire. On a ledge of rock that jutted out clear from the shadowy brush, they lingered for an instant. The soft blue light and the silence made them look a little ghostly – a tryst of spirits – as the tall shoulders drooped forward with circling arms into which Tillie crept, reaching upward until their faces met. The eyes of those two on horseback turned involuntarily toward each other at the sight of those married lovers, but there was no echo of a caress in their own movements, unless it was the caress of a glance; and in a few moments more they were within speaking distance of the camp.

"We are here," he said slowly, as Hardy and his wife, hearing the steps of the horse, hurried toward them.

"Yes, I know," she whispered.

It was their good-bye to the night.

A neigh from the renegade Betty was answered by Mowitza, and in an instant all the group about the camp was alive to the fact of the return. But the eager questions received few answers, for Genesee handed Rachel into the arms of Hardy, and said to Tillie:

"Don't let them pester her with questions to-night, Mrs. Hardy. She has no injuries, I guess, only she's used up and needs rest badly. I found her ready to faint in a gulch back from the trail about three miles. She'll be all right to-morrow, I reckon; only see that she gets a good rest and isn't bothered to-night."

No need to tell them that. Their gladness at her safe return made them all consideration.

Genesee and Mowitza also came in for a share of their solicitude, and the former for a quantity of thanks that met with rather brusque response.

"That's nothing to thank a man for," he said a little impatiently, as the Houghtons were contributing their share. "I reckon you don't know much about the duties of a scout or guide in this country, or you would know it was my business to go for the lady – just as it would be to hunt up lost stock, if any had strayed off. There wasn't much of a trick in finding her – Betty left too clear a trail; and I reckon it's time we all turned in to sleep instead of talking about it."

In the morning Rachel awoke refreshed and expectant in a

vague way. The incidents of the night before came crowding to her memory, sending the blood tingling through her veins as she thought of their meeting; of the ride; of those few significant words of his, and his face as he had spoken. She wondered at herself accepting it all so dreamily – as if in a lethargy. She was far from a stupor at the thought of it in the light of the early day, as she watched the blue mists rising up, up, from the valleys. Was he watching them, too? Was he thinking as she was of that ride and its revelations? Would he meet her again with that queer, distant manner of his? Would he —

Her ruminations were cut short by Tillie, who thought to awaken her with the proffer of a cup of hot coffee, and who was surprised to find her awake.

"Yes, I am awake, and hungry, too," she said briskly; "you did not give me nearly enough to eat last night. Is breakfast all ready? I wonder how poor Mowitza is this morning after her heavy load. Say, Tillie, did we look altogether ridiculous?"

"No, you did not," said Tillie stoutly. "It was wonderfully kind of him to bring you so carefully. I always said he had a great deal of heart in him; but he is gone, already."

"Gone! – where?" And the cup of coffee was set on the grass as if the hunger and thirst were forgotten. "Where?"

"We don't know," said Tillie helplessly. "Clara says back to his tribe; but she always has something like that to say of him. It's the queerest thing; even Hen is puzzled. He was wakened this morning about dawn by Genesee, who told him his time was up

with the party; that we could follow the trail alone well enough now; and that he had to join some Indian hunters away north of this to-night, so had to make an early start. I guess he forgot to speak of it last night, or else was too tired. He left a good-bye for Hen to deliver for him to the rest of us, and a *klahowya* to you."

"Did he?" asked the girl with a queer little laugh. "That was thoughtful of him. May his hunting be prosperous and his findings be great."

"Dear me!" said Tillie weakly, "you are just as careless about it as Clara, and I *did* think you would be sorry to lose him. I am, and so is Hen; but evidently persuasions were of no avail. He said he could not even wait for breakfast; that he should have gone last night. And the queerest thing about it is that he utterly refused any money from Hen, on the plea that the whole affair had been a pleasure ride, not work at all; and so – he is gone."

"And so – he is gone," said the girl, mimicking her tone; "what a tragical manner over a very prosaic circumstance! Tillie, my child, don't be so impressible, or I shall have to tell Hen that our guide has taken your affections in lieu of greenbacks."

"Rachel!"

"Matilda!" said the other mildly, looking teasingly over the rim of the coffee-cup she was slowly emptying. "Don't startle me with that tone before breakfast, and don't grieve over the exodus of Mr. Genesee Jack. I shall take on my own shoulders the duties of guide in his stead, so you need not worry about getting home safely; and in the meantime I am woefully hungry."

She was still a little dizzy as she rose to her feet, and very stiff and sore from her ride; but, joking over her rheumatic joints, she limped over to where the breakfast was spread on a flat rock.

"There is one way in which I may not be able to take Mr. Genesee Jack's place, in your estimation," she said lowly to Tillie as they were about to join the others. "I shall not be able to tell you stories of Indian conjurors or sing you Indian love-songs. I can't do anything but whistle."

"Hen, she wasn't the least bit interested about him leaving like that!" said Tillie confidentially to her husband a few hours later. "She never does seem to have much feeling for anything; but after he brought her back so carefully, and after the chumminess there was between them for a while, one would naturally think – "

"Of course one would," agreed her husband laughingly, "especially if one was an affectionate, match-making little person like yourself, and altogether a woman. But Rache – " and his glance wandered ahead to where the slim figure of the girl was seen stubbornly upright on Betty – "well, Rache never was like the rest of the girls at home, and I fancy she will never understand much of the sentimental side of life. She is too level-headed and practical."

CHAPTER VIII.
THE STORM – AND AFTER

Olapitski yahka ships

Two weeks later storm-clouds were flying low over the Kootenai hills and chasing shadows over the faces of two equestrians who looked at each other in comic dismay.

"Jim, we are lost!" stated the one briefly.

"I allow we are, Miss Hardy," answered the other, a boy of about fifteen, who gazed rather dubiously back over the way they had come and ahead where a half-blind trail led up along the mountain.

"Suppose we pitch pennies to see what direction to take," suggested the girl; but the boy only laughed.

"Haven't much time for that, Miss," he answered. "Look how them clouds is crowdin' us; we've got to hunt cover or get soaked. This trail goes somewhere; may be to an Injun village. I allow we'd better freeze to it."

"All right. We'll allow that we had," agreed Miss Hardy. "Betty, get around here, and get up this hill! I know every step is taking us farther from the ranch, but this seems the only direction in which a trail leads. Jim, how far do you suppose we are from

home?"

"'Bout fifteen miles, I guess," said the boy, looking blue.

"And we haven't found the lost sheep?"

"No, we haven't."

"And we have got lost?"

"Yes."

"Jim, I don't believe we are a howling success as sheep farmers."

"I don't care a darn about the sheep just now," declared Jim. "What I want to know is where we are to sleep to-night."

"Oh, you want too much," she answered briskly; "I am content to sit up all night, if I only can find a dry place to stay in – do you hear that?" as the thunder that had grumbled in the distance now sounded its threats close above them.

"Yes, I hear it, and it means business, too. I wish we were at the end of this trail," he said, urging his horse up through the scrubby growth of laurel.

The darkness was falling so quickly that it was not an easy matter to keep the trail; and the wind hissing through the trees made an open space a thing to wish for. Jim, who was ahead, gave a shout as he reached the summit of the hill where the trail crossed it.

"We're right!" he yelled that she might hear his voice above the thunder and the wind; "there's some sort of a shanty across there by a big pond; it's half a mile away, an' the rain's a-comin' – come on!"

And on they went in a wild run to keep ahead of the rain-cloud that was pelting its load at them with the force of hail. The girl had caught a glimpse of the white sheen of a lake or pond ahead of them; the shanty she did not wait to pick out from the gloom, but followed blindly after Jim, at a breakneck gait, until they both brought up short, in the shadow of a cabin in the edge of the timber above the lake.

"Jump off quick and in with you" called Jim; and without the ceremony of knocking, she pushed open the door and dived into the interior.

It was almost as dark as night. She stumbled around until she found a sort of bed in one corner, and sat down on it, breathless and wet. The rain was coming down in torrents, and directly Jim, with the saddles in his arms, came plunging in, shaking himself like a water-spaniel.

"Great guns! But it's comin' down solid," he gasped; "where are you?"

"Here – I've found a bed, so somebody lives here. Have you any matches?"

"I allow I have," answered Jim, "if they only ain't wet – no, by George, they're all right."

The brief blaze of the match showed him the fire-place and a pile of wood beside it, and a great osier basket of broken bark. "Say, Miss Hardy, we've struck great luck," he announced while on his knees, quickly starting a fire and fanning it into a blaze with his hat; "I wonder who lives here and where they are. Stickin'

to that old trail was a pay streak – hey?"

In the blaze of the fire the room assumed quite a respectable appearance. It was not a shanty, as Jim had at first supposed, but a substantial log-cabin, furnished in a way to show constant and recent occupation.

A table made like a wide shelf jutted from the wall under the one square window; a bed and two chairs that bespoke home manufacture were covered by bear-skins; on the floor beside the bed was a buffalo-robe; and a large locked chest stood against the wall. Beside the fire-place was a cupboard with cooking and table utensils, and around the walls hung trophies of the hunt. A bow and quiver of arrows and a knotted silken sash hung on one wooden peg, and added to a pair of moccasins in the corner, gave an Indian suggestion to the occupancy of the cabin, but the furnishing in general was decidedly that of a white person; to the rafters were fastened some beaver-paws and bear-claws, and the skins of three rattlesnakes were pendent against the wall.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.